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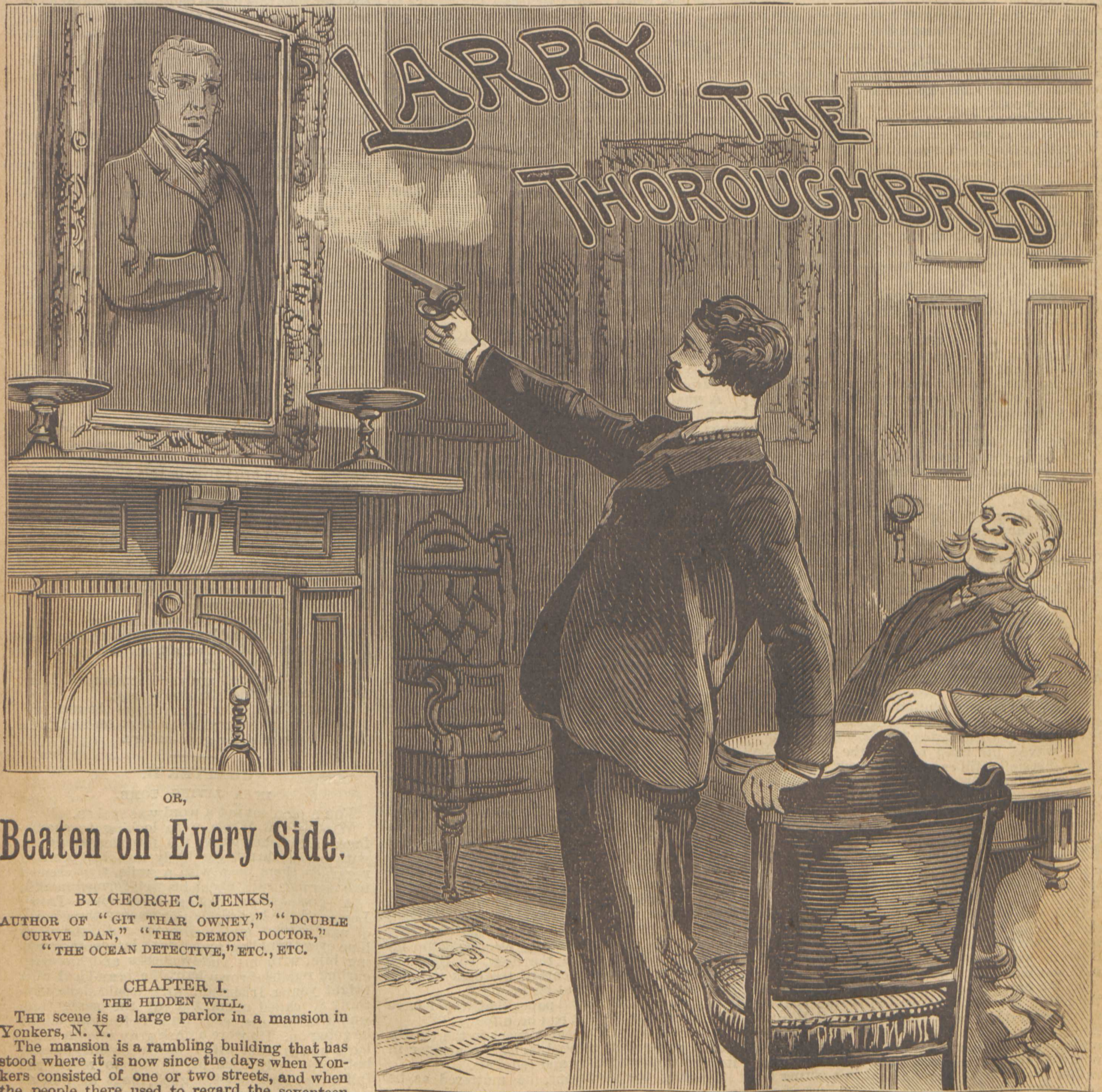
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OR, Beaten on Every Side.

BY GEORGE C. JENKS,
AUTHOR OF "GIT THAR OWNEY," "DOUBLE
CURVE DAN," "THE DEMON DOCTOR,"
"THE OCEAN DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE HIDDEN WILL.

THE scene is a large parlor in a mansion in
Yonkers, N. Y.

The mansion is a rambling building that has
stood where it is now since the days when Yon-
kers consisted of one or two streets, and when
the people there used to regard the seventeen
miles' journey to New York City as an under-
taking to be ventured upon only once a year.

POINTING STRAIGHT AT THE SPOT WHERE LARRY LANG STOOD PEERING AT HIM THROUGH THE
CRACK, THE YOUNG SCOUNDREL FIRED AT HIS UNCLE'S FAC-SIMILE OVER THE MANTEL.

The house had been in the family of the Wintons ever since the time that old Winton, in or about the year 1830, had spent a portion of his fortune made in New York in the money-lending business, in what he declared should be the handsomest residence between the Battery and Albany. He was a close old curmudgeon, and in building this house, and furnishing it with every luxury that money could procure, his object was more to revenge himself upon such of his customers who had treated him with contempt, while borrowing his money, and had laughed at the idea of his ever presuming to enjoy such luxuries as they had been used to all their lives.

"I'll show them," the old man had grunted.

And he did. He built this house, and then took cold and died of pneumonia, chuckling over the fact that he had left his only remaining son to cut a dash with his money and live in a palace worthy of the proudest of his patrons.

This son had entered into the spirit of his father's wishes, and had lived like a prince until a week before this narrative opens, when he, too, had died, a bachelor.

The large parlor was full, for it was that most interesting occasion, the reading of the will of a rich man.

The Winton just deceased had not been able to reduce his fortune, although he had spent money lavishly, for most of his estate consisted of property in New York City, which had doubled, trebled and quadrupled in value so rapidly, that he could not keep his expenses up to his income, try as he would.

Some forty or fifty people were in the room; most of them were curiosity-mongers, for the only relatives of the deceased were a young man, dark and handsome, and a girl of perhaps twenty, whose clear-cut, patrician features, and a shadowy glint of gold in her glossy dark tresses bespoke her a member of one of those old Irish families that have from time to time done their part toward keeping up the standard of American aristocracy. She had deep-blue eyes, shadowed by long black lashes—one more indication of her origin.

"So, ladies and gentlemen, this will, which is dated the 5th of June, 1885, leaves everything to Mark Winton, the nephew of the deceased, after a few bequests to servants and \$5,000 to an inebriate asylum in California. That is the gist of it."

The lawyer, who was speaking, was a bluff old fellow, with black-rimmed eye-glasses, and he thus addressed the company after reading the will to the end, with all its legal verbiage and tiresome repetitions.

The dark young man looked up with a smile at the lawyer, and then glanced at the girl.

"So I am my uncle's sole heir, eh?" he muttered, slowly. "Well, well!"

The old lawyer had been looking at him with no particular favor. Now he burst out:

"Yes, so the will says. And I wish it didn't. William Winton was a fool, or he would have taken care of his niece. However, you have it, and I hope it will do you good."

"I am the master here, then?" asked the young man with a smile.

"Yes."

"Well, then, I have the pleasure of informing you that I shall not need your services in connection with my estate, in future. I will send my own attorney to you to-morrow, and you will please arrange with him about settling the affairs of the estate, and placing the business in his hands. Good-morning!"

He waved his hand toward the door as he spoke, his smile still raising his black mustache, and wrinkling the corners of his nose into a sneer.

"Now, look here, young man," spluttered the lawyer, as he gathered up his papers and placed them in a black leather valise. "My name is Wilkins Boyd, and I am known in New York as a peaceful man. But, just as sure as you ever speak to me on the street, I'll break your nose with my fist. Remember that!"

He burst out of the room in a towering passion, and in another moment his feet could be heard crunching the gravel outside as he walked down the sweeping drive on his way to the railroad station.

It did not take more than five minutes for the rest of the company to follow the lawyer, after congratulating the new owner of Winton Lodge, leaving only Mark Winton, the girl, and an individual with shriveled countenance, a long nose and bald head, who, in a suit of clothes rather too tight for him, had sat in a corner behind a fat lady all through the reading of the will, as if anxious to keep out of sight.

"Kate, you will stay here, of course," said

the young man. "My being the proprietor need not make any difference to you. You have been accustomed to the house for the last eighteen months, and I want you to make it your home now."

The girl's only answer was a sob.

"Why, what have you been doing to the girl?" broke in a shrill voice, as a sharp little woman, with white hair hanging in curls around her face, bustled into the room, and walked over to the girl. "What's the matter, Katie dear? Come with me."

She took the girl's hand and led her from the room without bestowing a glance upon the master of the house.

As the door closed, Mark Winton looked at the shriveled man with an ugly smile.

"I'll get rid of that woman, Wible. She takes too much upon herself. If she has been housekeeper here for forty years she doesn't own the place, I'll soon show her that."

"Leave that to me, master. Leave that to me. I've helped you get this place, and I won't desert you now."

It was Wible that spoke, and he accompanied his remarks with a grin of triumph that seemed to have a most irritating effect upon the other.

"Wible, when I want to leave my affairs to you, I will let you know. In the mean time, get out!"

"Sir?"

"Get out!"

Wible looked doubtfully at Mark for a moment, as if inclined to resent this peremptory dismissal, but, something in the eye of the other warned him that it would hardly be safe, and he did not stay to argue further.

"At last, I am alone," muttered the young man, as he locked the door after Wible, and looked around the room.

The parlor was a large apartment, furnished with the taste as well as luxury that bespoke the work of professional upholsterers and decorators. From the soft settees and velvet-covered easy-chairs to the immense mirror over the marble fire-place, and the lustres that jingled musically as one walked across the soft Turkish carpets and rugs, everything showed that money had been spent without stint to make the room perfect.

Three large windows looked out upon the lawn in front of the house, and beyond to the wide avenue running high above, but parallel with the Hudson River.

A smaller room behind the large parlor communicated by folding doors that were generally open, the space being filled in with rich *portieres* of red plush.

Looking cautiously about the parlor, and glancing out of each of the three windows in turn, Mark Winton stood irresolutely in the middle of the room, as if considering.

"Yes," he muttered. "I will look at it and see if it is safe."

He tried the door through which Wible had disappeared, and examined the room on all sides to make sure that he was alone. Then he pulled the *portieres* aside and went into the smaller room.

Furnished in much the same way as the parlor, it had a bookcase in one corner, near the only window that looked out upon a carefully-kept garden, that was separated by a light iron fence from a meadow in which could be seen a large, well-built brick stable.

"So! Now for my lovely cousin's property. Fortunate for me that I found this thing first."

Mark Winton had let down the lid of a desk that formed part of the bookcase, and was fumbling in one corner at the very back.

He took a pen, and with the pointed end of the penholder, pressed in the corner. As he did so, a portion of what looked like the solid wood of the desk moved silently aside, telescoping, as it were, into itself, and revealing a shallow space some nine inches long, by six wide.

At this point of his proceedings, Mark Winton arose and looked cautiously out of the window. Then he pulled down the window-shade, and finding the room too dark for his purpose, touched a button at the side of the bookcase, and lighted an incandescent electric lamp ingeniously placed inside the desk, so that the light fell upon the contents of the desk without illuminating the room at large.

"Now, for that cursed paper that would have meant ruin for me if it had been found!"

He took from the secret space in the desk a folded paper that showed its legal character in its formal chirography and red seals.

Opening the document, he muttered as he read:

"Um! 'Everything to my beloved niece, Kate Winton, in recognition of her care and

affection for the last year or two of my life.' Yes. Well, Uncle Winton, I have blocked that little game of yours. Your beloved niece will not take everything. She never heard of this will, dated three months before your death, but I happened to know of it, and I took care it should never come to light."

He leaned back in his chair, with the will in his hand, the incandescent light shedding a pale gleam upon his thoughtful face, and seeming to bring into prominence certain hard lines about the mouth, and wrinkles at the corners of the eyes, that did not add to his personal appearance.

"If she would only accept the love that I am ready to throw at her feet, how happy we might be," he mused. "There would be no question about the property then. What is mine would be hers, and this piece of paper would not make any difference one way or the other."

He folded the will, slowly, replaced it in the secret recess and closed it by pushing the penholder in the corner again.

He was so engrossed that he had not noticed a dark figure hovering about in the shadows of the small room, watching every movement he made. He had been supremely unconscious of the fact that this figure had bent over him as he read the will, and that a hand had been uplifted at one time as if with the intention of grasping the paper.

Yet such a figure was there, and the dim light of the room could not hide the shriveled countenance, the long, beak-like nose and the bald head of Wible. He was bending over Mark Winton like an evil spirit.

As the young man replaced the will and closed the secret recess, Wible bent over him in his eagerness, lost his balance, and—fell over with his two arms around the neck of Mark Winton.

Like a flash the young man turned and grappled with the man.

"You rascal!" he hissed. "What are you doing here? How did you get in?"

"Through the door over there. 'Ow did yer s'pose?" was Wible's response, as he held the young man at bay with more strength than one would have supposed him to possess. "Don't try no back-heel on me, 'cause it won't go. I learned to wrestle in the old country, an' I've thrown better men than you at 'Ackney Wick many a time."

In fact Wible showed that this was no idle boast, by giving Mark Winton a twirl that took him clean off his feet and laid him on his back, as helpless as a child.

"I've a bloomin' good mind to shut yer wind off, for tryin' to play tricks on me," growled Wible, as he kept his hand on the other's throat. "We are pards in this thing, and now you are tryin' to keep things from me at the first go-off. It makes me so mad, I—"

Perhaps he would have carried out his amiable threat and choked Winton then and there had he not been interrupted.

But he felt a strong hand on the back of his neck and he was lifted away and thrown to the other end of the room as if he had been a rag doll, while a cheery voice cried:

"Aisy now! aisy! Give the masther a chance. Begorra, it's chokin' him yez are, without givin' him a breath at all, at all, an' I'll niver see that done, so I won't!"

"Who the deuce are you?" exclaimed Mark Winton and Wible, simultaneously.

"Larry Lang, from Kerry!" was the response, followed by a hearty laugh that seemed to be the outcome of sheer good-nature.

CHAPTER II.

IN A LIVING TOMB.

FOR a moment not a word was spoken.

Winton and Wible were looking in shame-faced astonishment at the intruder, while he, with hands thrust carelessly into his pockets, regarded them both with a smile that seemed to hover naturally about his well-formed mouth.

A good-looking young fellow was Larry Lang. Some twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, strong and well-built, with the deep blue eyes twinkling under dark lashes, and making him, with his ruddy cheeks and his crisp curling reddish-brown hair, the beau-ideal of a bright young Irishman, who would dare anything if called upon, but at the same time would be always ready for any fun that might be going on. He wore a dark gray woolen shirt, laced up the front with crimson cord and tassels, but sufficiently open at the top to reveal the full throat that denoted good lungs as well as great bodily strength.

"I beg yer pardon, sorr, but I just happened to be in the house to spake to Miss

Katie, an' I heard a ruction here, so I thought it was my duty, d'ye see, to take a hand in."

As he lay on the floor for the moment it has taken to tell this, Mark Winton made up his mind what to do. It would not be safe to denounce Wible, and yet the fracas must be explained in some way.

"Ah, very good, Larry! You are zealous in my behalf, but you were mistaken, this time. Wible and I were only trying a new fall that we saw together at a wrestling match at Ikey Dave's place in New York last week."

"Ah, that was it, eh?" responded Larry, doubtfully. Then, to himself: "But I must say, it was pretty tough wrestling. Faith, a couple of falls like that, an' he'd not have any breath left to lie with, so he wouldn't."

Wible had arisen and was brushing off his clothes with his hands in a way that evinced the most tender solicitude for the tight-fitting coat and trowsers that they hardly deserved.

"Yes, it was just a blooming wrestle, but I think I was gettin' the worst of it when you came in. Wasn't I, Mark?"

Young Winton frowned at this familiar address, but he restrained his ire for the present and, closing his desk, waved his hand to Larry to depart.

The young man walked out of the door with a shake of the head and as soon as he found himself outside changed his demeanor so suddenly and entirely that Mark Winton and Wible would have been considerably surprised had they seen it.

"So," he muttered, in tones that bore not a trace of the rich brogue he had used a moment before, "the rogues are quarreling already, are they? Well, it is under such circumstances, that honest men get their rights. Keep a good heart, Miss Kate! I have sworn that you shall have justice, and you shall, as sure as my name is Larry Lang! They think me a green country boy, but I will crush them at last as sure as they are villains, and—"

He was interrupted by the voice of Wible, as the door through which he had just passed was thrown open, and the long nose and small eyes appeared.

"What are you a-doing in that bloomin' passage? Why don't yer get out and tend to yer work about the stables? That's where you ought to be."

"Arrah, now, Mr. Wible, sure I was only lookin' to see what sort of a place I was in, d'ye moind. But I'm going immajetly—I'm goin', Mr. Wible," replied Larry, dropping into his brogue again.

"Well, git!" commanded Wible, as he shut the door with a bang.

"The rascals are up to something else already. I must see what they are doing," decided Larry as he stood watching the door.

Doubtless the reader has wondered where Larry Lang found himself when he was dismissed from the room in which Mark Winton had had their little dispute.

He was not in the open air, neither was he in any part of the house used by the household.

Owing to the peculiar formation of the ground upon which Winton Lodge stood, the doorway by which both Wible and Larry Lang had dopped in so unexpectedly upon Mark Winton led directly into a passageway that passed under ground to a brick structure at the extreme end of the paddock or meadow, but at some distance from the stable already referred to. The brick house, or stable, or whatever it was built for originally, had been used for a sort of lumber room for the last quarter of a century, and was pretty well crowded with rusty shovels, rakes, hoes, spades, a wheelbarrow or two, a disabled lawn mower, and other articles that would naturally accumulate in such a place.

Very few people knew of the existence of the passage between the mansion and the stable. Certainly, Mark Winton did not suppose that Larry Lang (who had come over from Ireland only two months before, and had been a sort of stableman at the Lodge for three weeks), had discovered the secret.

Mark Winton had forgotten this door when he sat himself down at the desk to look over the will that proved him a usurper, although he had no reason to expect any disturbance from that quarter, even although the door was unfastered. But he would have bolted it had he thought of it.

The passage was lighted in an ingenious manner by reflectors placed at intervals, which brought the light from gratings that looked as if they belonged to a sewer, and ran along by the solid stone wall which divided the Winton property from the road that ran by the side of it, winding away till it reached the small village

of Hastings, three miles distant. The old Winton who built the Lodge had amused himself by putting in odd devices like this passage and its lighting arrangements, for he liked to be different from any one else, and he had plenty of money to carry out his caprices.

Larry Lang walked slowly along the passage for a few steps, wrapped in thought. Then he stopped.

"I must find out what those fellows are doing in there," he muttered. "There is some deviltry afoot, and unless I can get at the bottom of it now, it may be too late to stop it."

He turned around mechanically as he thus pondered, and glanced at the door of the room in which he had left the precious pair.

As he did so he thought he saw a gleam of light shoot out from the stone wall on his right, just beyond where one of the polished metal reflectors caught the rays of daylight from a grating.

"What was that?" he exclaimed, involuntarily.

He turned his head from side to side, and looked on the spot from different points of view, but could not catch it again.

"Pshaw! Must have been something the matter with my eyes; guess the gloom of this passage has half-blinded me, and yet—I thought I—Ah! There it is again!"

He rushed forward as he made this exclamation and placed his hand upon the wall where he was sure he had seen the point of light.

"Strange! There is something shining here, I am sure. And yet I cannot see it now."

He felt carefully over the rough stone wall, and the mortar, that was as hard as the stone itself, but could see nothing that would reflect back lights. He had just made up his mind that it was nothing more than an optical illusion, when his finger came in contact with a smooth knob like the round head of those brass nails that are used by upholsterers for leather-covered chairs, etc.

The knob had at one time been of polished steel, but in its position in the stone wall for over half a century it had become tarnished and dull, save for one small spot not larger than a pin-head, which had retained its original polish, and which had been caught by Larry Lang in some position so that it appeared to be a gleam of light.

Larry felt sure that this knob was not there by accident. During his short stay at Winton Lodge he had learned enough about the place to be convinced that the builder of the mansion had not allowed secret knobs, passages and other eccentricities, to be put in without some purpose, and Larry was never satisfied until he had probed them to the bottom.

Larry had known Kate Winton all her life. Together they had been brought up in County Kerry, until her father had brought her to America two years before this story opens, in the hope that his brother, of Winton Lodge, would be able to help him retrieve his shattered fortunes, for the sake of his motherless child.

Kate was Larry's foster-sister, and the love that had existed between them as children had never changed when they grew up, although it had always been that of a brother and sister. When Larry heard that her father had died soon after reaching America, and that the orphan girl was living in the mansion of her uncle, as his housekeeper, he felt that he must come over and watch over his little sister.

Larry was only a farmer's boy, with a genius for managing horses, and it was not until he had ridden in a steeplechase for a rich landowner, some score or two of miles from his native town, and won the race with one of the most unmanageable beasts that a man had ever thrown his leg over, that Larry had been able to scrape up enough money to pay his passage to the United States.

Here he was now, however, and he had been fortunate enough to get a position in the stables of Winton Lodge at once, where he could watch over his sister, without any one being aware that he had any particular interest in her. Mark Winton had been born in America, and knew practically nothing about his fair cousin's life in the Old Country.

"Now, what can this little thing be for?" mused Larry, as he poked at it desperately.

Even as he spoke came the answer!

A section of the stone wall, about four feet high by two wide, swung inward, away from him, leaving a space through which he could readily crawl.

He did not hesitate. The heavy stone-work was still moving, silently and slowly when he passed through the opening and tried to make out where he was. Very little light penetrated

the mysterious recess, for none could reach it save by way of the passage, which, itself, only had the reflected illumination from the gratings aforesaid.

Larry stumbled over a steep flight of steps leading upward he knew not where, when his shoulder came into contact with the heavy stone door, at least eighteen inches thick, and pushed it away.

Larry's feet became mixed up with the steps and he fell with all his weight against the stone-work.

It yielded to the pressure, swung slowly back, and before he realized what had taken place it had fallen back into its old position, while a sharp snap told that its secret fastening had caught and that the wall was solid again!

In the fearfully black darkness, Larry regained his feet and felt along the wall where the stone door had closed, but it might never have moved for all that he could tell by touching it. It seemed to be as firm as the eternal hills.

"This is interesting," muttered the imprisoned man, as a thrill of horror he could not repress shot through him. "If I only had a match, so that I could see where I was!"

He felt in all his pockets, hopelessly, for what he knew was not there, and then summoning all his resolution, groped his way to the steps and made his way up them.

One, two, three, four, five, six!

He was about to take another step, and then some impulse caused him to feel in front of him. His hand encountered only empty air!

Puzzled he cautiously knelt down and felt around him again.

In a moment he realized that the six steps led nowhere! They may have been built with some purpose originally by the eccentric old man so long dead, but now they simply stopped in mid-air, and all Larry could think of was to come down and try to decide what to do next.

It was now that he seemed to be brought face to face with his situation for the first time.

He was buried alive, in a stone coffin from from which he might never escape!

CHAPTER III.

A TERRIBLE FIGURE IN A DARK ROOM.

WHEN Kate Winton left the parlor with the old housekeeper, after her cool dismissal by Mark, she had gone straight to the old lady's private room over the back parlor, and had cried upon the motherly bosom for half an hour, until her bursting heart was somewhat relieved.

"I cannot stay here, Mrs. Taylor. I cannot stay here! Oh, what shall I do?"

"There, never mind, dear! It is a shame that the old man should have made such a will, and still more of a shame that he did not make another before he died, in which he could have remembered you. But, then, he always had a way of putting things off. Very likely he meant to have made another will. In fact, I have heard him say as much more than once."

Thus the good old lady prattled on, Kate looking sadly out of the window, and allowing her own thoughts to roam at will, regardless of Mrs. Taylor's words.

"Mrs. Taylor," said the girl at last, "I am going to see the only friend I have in New York who can perhaps help me. He is not polished, and he uses the most dreadful language sometimes, but he was my father's friend more than once, and I know he'll do anything for his daughter."

"Who do you mean, dear?"

"David Donahue."

"What! the man they call Ikey Dave?"

"Yes."

"But, you cannot go to him. He keeps a low sporting saloon in the Bowery. That is no place for the daughter of Walter Winton."

The girl set her teeth, and with a slight contraction of her eyebrows, answered, simply:

"Nevertheless, I am going. I would rather trust any one than the man who has presumed to offer me his love again and again, in spite of my repeated refusals—just because he thinks I am in his power. Mark Winton may be my cousin, but he is also my bitterest foe. David Donahue saved my dear father's life once when he was attacked by footpads in a dark street in New York, and I have often heard my father say that he would trust him rather than many men with more pretensions to honesty and goodness. He will perhaps tell me how I can earn my living in New York."

In less than an hour, Kate Winton was walking out of the Grand Central Depot at Forty-second street, New York.

The girl knew the city pretty well, and so had no difficulty in finding Ikey Dave's "sporting resort," as he called it, in the Bowery.

A side door led directly into the house by a flight of stairs, up which Kate remembered her father had taken her once to visit Donahue. She had been used to going anywhere with her father, and had never been afraid to go to Ikey Dave's or anywhere else, so long as he was with her.

Now, however, that she was alone, she felt a little nervous. She could hear the rough voices of men in the saloon below, and she did not know exactly what she should say to David Donahue when she did meet him.

While thus thinking she found herself at the top of the stairs and facing two doors.

"Which door leads into his parlor, I wonder?" thought Kate.

She boldly pushed open that nearest to her and entered.

As she did so, and while yet dazzled by the strong glare of the afternoon sun that beat down, unobstructed, through a large skylight, a short, thick-set man, wearing a pink sleeveless undershirt, a pair of corduroy trousers supported by a strap around his waist, and tan shoes, turned a partial somersault from the middle of the large room, and lay at her feet, looking up at her from a pair of small eyes that twinkled on either side of a fat, flushed nose, and wildly waving a pair of dirty boxing gloves.

Another man, in similar attire, stood facing Kate. He was in approved sparring attitude, and it was easy to see that he had just struck the blow that had caused the stout man to turn the somersault.

Kate was about to retire as hastily as she had appeared. But the thick-set man was upon his feet in an instant, and grasping the right hand of Kate between his two dirty boxing-gloves, shook it in a way that showed how glad he was to see her.

"Put her thar, Miss Winton! Durn me ef I ain't glad ter see yer! Thought ez yer hed fer-got all yer old friends. Ain't hed such a pleasant surprise sence I got back from Californy, twenty years ago."

There was no mistaking the friendship of David Donahue as he thus spoke, and although his manners were uncouth, and his language such as is heard among Western miners, Kate Winton felt that she had not done wrong in coming to him for advice.

"That'll do fer ter-day, Cooley," he said to the man who had knocked him down, and who had been glancing in rather a bashful manner at Kate. "I guess yer hev that counter down pretty fine now. I didn't think thar wuz er man of your weight in New York thet could knock Ikey Dave off his pins. But, you done it, clean ez er whistle!"

Cooley appeared glad to get his dismissal, for he walked over to a little curtained alcove at the end of the room, and in a few minutes emerged dressed ready for the street, in a short sack coat, a fur cap, and a heavy silk muffler around his neck, notwithstanding that it was mid-summer, and a very warm day.

"He does it for his stamina," explained Dave, as he removed his own gloves and cracked all his fingers, one after the other. "He's training for his glove fight with Thunderbolt Higgins next month, and he has to take care of himself."

Cooley vanished with a gruff "Good-day, Ikey!" and a sheepish glance of admiration at Kate, and then the girl told Ikey that she was penniless, and that her uncle had left all his property to her cousin, Mark Winton, and that she could not possibly stay at Yonkers, although she had been offered a home in the old mansion by its new heir.

"You're right, gal. You're right," said Donahue. "Mark Winton is er sneak, an' I know it! Him and thet thar Wible ought ter be put in ther dog-cage with ther other hounds an' curs, an' dumped in ther East River. That's what ought ter be done with them!"

"But, what can I do, Mr. Donahue?"

"Wal, now, thet's not so dead easy ter say. In course, yer must live *somewhar*, an' I don't zactly know whar. Yer can't stay hyer, of course, an' I can't think whar ter advise yer to go. Hevn't yer any money at all?"

"Only a few dollars."

"Um! No property of any kind?"

"Nothing except my horse, Shiloh. He is mine. My uncle gave him to me a year ago."

Ikey Dave gave a great start, as he asked, eagerly:

"What, Shiloh—that grand Mambrino horse? Do you know thet Shiloh, in ther hands of a good trainer, is er fortune for its owner? Do you know thet you can laugh et thet cousin of yours, and thet if thet thar horse is properly managed, he can be er fortune for yer?"

Ikey Dave was walking up and down the

room in a state of wild excitement as he poured out these questions—neither expecting or wanting an answer.

"What do you mean?" asked the girl. "I don't understand you."

"No, gals never understand nothin' of thet kind," responded Dave, impatiently. Then, apologetically: "Of course, Miss Kate, you couldn't be expected to know nothin' 'bout the pedigrees an' performances of horses. But I tell you thet Shiloh is er wonder. I know him—knowed him afore the old man had him. He is about four years old now, an' none of the smart fellers on the turf know what he kin do. But I know, an' you bet I'm glad you hev ther horse! I thought he belonged to Mark Winton, and if he hed I would never hev said nothin' about it."

"But, Mr. Donahue?" put in Kate.

"Wait er minute, my dear—I beg yer pardon, miss. I'm kinder excited."

To prove that he was excited, Ikey danced around the big room and hit a swinging bag with his clinched fist so violently that he made the very floor shake. Then he cleared a bar some five feet from the floor in a running jump, and concluded his exercises by catching at a pair of iron rings suspended from the ceiling and throwing his body into all sorts of contortions for a minute or two.

When at last, he dropped, right end up on the mattress beneath the rings, his face was very red and his breath rather short.

"Now, I'll tell you what ter do: Go back ter Yonkers an' keep yer eye on thet horse. Put him in er stable by himself, an' git some one ez yer kin trust ter stay with him all ther time."

"But—"

"No, don't say nothin'. Haven't yer got er friend ez yer kin put near thet horse—some one ez hez been in ther employ of the old man?"

"Why, there's Larry. He—"

"Larry Lang! In course! I hed clean fer-got him. Thet's the feller! He'd do anything fer you. An' he understands horses, too. It wuz him ez run thet steeplechase in Kerry a few months ago. I heard 'bout him long afore he come ter ther United States. In Ireland they called him 'Larry the Thoroughbred.'"

"He's my foster-brother," said Kate simply. "I did not tell him I was here. I was afraid he would try to dissuade me."

"That's all right. But, you hurry back an' see him. Tell him to watch that horse ez if—ez if—wuz you ez he wuz lookin' after. I bet he'd never let any trouble come ter you, ef he could help it."

The girl blushed slightly, and rising from the chair in which Donahue had seated her, made a movement to go.

"Hold on! Thet won't do. You ain't er going back to Yonkers without a bite of supper," interposed Ikey.

He led her into a room at the back of the gymnasium—in fact through the very doorway that Kate meant to have entered, when she arrived, and showed a comfortably furnished parlor in which supper was already prepared on a table near the window, through which the usual New York view of close back yards was spread for the delectation of Dave and his visitors.

"Hurry up, hyar, Mary!" cried Dave, and a wholesome-looking girl of sixteen or so, came from the kitchen behind the parlor, with a teapot, and bowing gracefully to Kate, sat down to do the duties of hostess.

"This hyar is Miss Kate Winton—my daughter, Mary, who hez kept house for me like er jewel ever sence her mother died."

Having performed the ceremony of introduction, Dave fell-to at his supper as if he hadn't eaten anything for several days, leaving the two girls to get along together as best they could.

The afternoon had deepened into evening and the dark would soon be darkness, when Dave arose and listening at a tin speaking tube by the side of the mantel-piece, for a moment, rushed from the room and clattered down-stairs.

"I am afraid there is trouble down in the bar-room," observed Mary, calmly. "There generally is when father runs down like that. Somebody will get hurt if they don't behave when he gets among them."

She began clearing away the supper things, carrying them into the little kitchen, and apparently not thinking any more about her father and the row that might be taking place below.

Kate hesitated. It was getting late, and she felt that she ought to be returning to Yonkers, to obey Donahue and give her attention to Shiloh. She felt, although she hardly understood why, that the horse was to exercise a great influence over her future fortunes.

It was quite dark now, and the little parlor was in deep gloom save for a stream of light that came through the half-open door of the little kitchen in which Mary was singing merrily as she washed her dishes.

Kate was sitting in an arm-chair behind the kitchen door, where it was very dark, and where the light from the kitchen threw her into deeper shadow, by contrast.

"I will go. I suppose Mr. Donahue is busy down-stairs, and will not expect to find me here when he returns—if he does return for some hours; so, I will go."

Kate had made a movement to arise when the voices of two men in the room made her draw back into as small a space as possible and listen intently.

"I tell you, Wible, she has gone! I pumped the old woman, and although she would not admit it, I know that Kate has left the house."

"What a bloomin' idiot she must be!" was the response of the other, which Kate recognized as Wible just as surely as she knew his companion to be Mark Winton.

The two came cautiously into the lane of light from the kitchen and looked at Mary, who, all unconscious of their presence, was still singing over her dishes.

"Now, Wible, we have to arrange with this bartender here to get that horse safely away, and to keep him till we need him. Shiloh must win some money for me this fall—and, what is more, it must win me—"

"What?"

"A wife."

"A wife?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Listen! Kate is away. That I am sure of. She probably has some ridiculous idea of being independent, and so forth."

"Yes, she'll get bloomin' sick of that," observed Wible.

"She will come back in the course of a day or two. But, in the mean time, we must get that horse away. She will be crazy, and will come to me. I won't know anything about the horse, of course."

"Of course," chuckled Wible.

"But, I will try to find it for her. See? Well, I'll work on her gratitude, and all that sort of thing."

"Oh, you're a clever harticle, you are!"

"Never mind what I am. I'll get her to think a great deal of me, and I'll get the horse back for her."

"Ow d'ye mean?"

"Never you trouble yourself about what I mean. I know what I'm doing. I will get her back her horse, as she will think, but it *will not* be Shiloh."

"Crickey! You're a knowin' cove!" burst from Wible, in an ecstasy of admiration.

"Hush! Here comes that bartender."

"Do you know him?"

"No, but he was described to me. He has a full, red beard, a deep scar on his right cheek, where he was slashed with a bowie-knife, in New Orleans, a year ago, and he always wears a broad Panama hat."

"That's so! That's *ere's* your man," whispered Wible, as the two withdrew from the shaft of light, just as a third man entered the room, and stood where the light fell full upon him.

Kate shuddered.

The man that stood in the room, so near to her that she could have touched him, was a scoundrel in every fold of his clothing and every lineament of his face. A heavy sack-coat was buttoned tightly around a lithe, powerful form. On his head, which was covered with crispy, curling red hair, was a broad, flapping Panama hat, that partly obscured his countenance. But, Kate could see that he wore a heavy red beard, and that down his right cheek was a livid mark, that might easily have been made by a bowie-knife, as Wible had said. To add to his unattractiveness, the fellow had the most horrible cross-eyes she had ever seen.

For at least a minute the girl gazed upon this figure, fascinated by its very ugliness.

CHAPTER IV.

LARRY LANG ON THE TRACK.

WE left Larry Lang in a rather unpleasant predicament.

When he descended the six stone steps, he felt that he was walking down to end his life at the bottom of the cold, dark cell into which, as he told himself, his foolhardiness had brought him.

For a minute or two his courage faltered. Then he stood up, and slapping himself upon his chest, made up his mind to see whether he needs must despair before giving up.

He felt his way cautiously about his prison, and soon found that it was a sort of corridor, some four feet in width by eight long.

The flight of stone steps stood in the middle, and he found, by the sense of touch, that the back of them was a perpendicular wall, so that had he walked off the top step he must have fallen straight to the ground.

The four walls of his oblong prison felt like the rough stone of those of the outer corridor. There was no sign of a door anywhere.

"This is a jolly place to spend the rest of my life," mused Larry.

He had been sitting upon the bottom step, thinking—thinking.

He got up mechanically and felt his way around to the back of the flight of stone steps, where he could rest his hand against the perpendicular flat surface.

As he did so he made a discovery!

The surface was of metal—probably sheet-iron, and sounded hollow when he rapped it with his knuckles.

He felt sure that these peculiar steps, with their sheet-iron backing, were not placed in this vault for nothing. There must be some special purpose for their existence here.

It was pitch dark, but that did not prevent him prosecuting his inquiries.

He could not find anything in the sheet-iron back to give him a clue to what he sought—namely, some outlet from this vault other than that by which he had entered. He must try something else.

He walked cautiously up the stone steps again, and felt along and around the top one. He could hardly have told what he expected to find, but something seemed to convey to him the assurance that he would not search in vain.

Ah! Here was something!

He had found, at the side of the step, let into the solid stone, a bolt.

He pulled it with all his force, but it seemed to be rusted into the stone.

"Now, Mr. Bolt, you've got to come, you know, so you may as well come now," said Larry, as he gave a vicious tug at the bolt.

This time his effort was successful. The bolt yielded with a grumbling squeak. Then there was a rattle-bang-crash as if the whole place was falling to pieces.

The noise did not last more than a moment, however, and as Larry sneezed violently, in the endeavor to get some of the dust out of his eyes, nose and throat, he tried to realize what had happened.

"That bolt seems to have held the whole concern together," he muttered.

He went down the steps and felt his way cautiously to the back.

Then he understood what had taken place.

The sheet-iron back of the steps was movable. It was hinged at the bottom, and the top had been held by the bolt that Larry had displaced. When the bolt had been withdrawn the sheet-iron back fell out against the opposite wall. On the reverse side of the iron plate—that is the side that had rested snugly against the back of the stone staircase, there were ridges at regular intervals, like the slats on a gang-plank for passing between a steamboat and a wharf. These ridges, or slats, formed a ladder by which one could, with ease, climb up the wall of the vault!

It did not take Larry as long to find all this out as it has to describe it.

In a very few seconds he was crawling cautiously up the ridges, and, reaching the top, was feeling in the wall for a door or outlet of some kind.

"Here is something that feels different from the rest of the wall," he said to himself as his hand came in contact with a smooth surface that gave forth a similar sound to that of the back of the steps.

He found a panel and pushing it first one way and then another, ascertained that the door—for a door it was—would slide aside.

Soon there was a space through which he could step into a sort of recess just big enough to hold him.

No sooner was he inside than he could hear the low murmur of voices, as if they were in an adjoining apartment muffled by an intervening wall.

Larry Lang uttered a scarcely audible whistle.

"By George! I begin to see what all this means!" he exclaimed in a whisper.

A ray of light from a small hole at the height

of his face had attracted his attention as soon as the door had slid back.

Larry put his eye to the hole. All he could see was that the room adjoining was the back parlor in which he had left Mark Winton and Wible, and he knew at once that it was their voices he heard. He could only look straight ahead however, and see the pattern of the paper on the opposite wall, above the head of any one who might be in the room.

"This won't do. I must see them and hear what they are saying. They are up to some deviltry, and they mean Kate to be their victim. But they are reckoning without her foster-brother."

He pushed the wall before him, and satisfied himself from the way it yielded that it was canvas over wood.

"I wish I could make that hole larger or find another," reflected Larry. "I am not much better off here than I was before, except that I guess I can break down this wall if necessary, and take a flying leap into the room upon the heads of those precious pair of rascals."

It seemed as if Larry's words were prophetic, for, even as he was speaking, the canvas and wood silently fell away from him in a square mass, and would have dropped into the room had he not seized it quickly with both hands.

For a moment he did not move. He was holding the section of wall almost in place, but not quite. His fingers could have been seen by any one in the room who happened to be looking in his direction, and streaks of light on each side of the wood and canvas he was holding warned him that he was now practically in the parlor.

The voices in the room kept on steadily, and although Larry had too much on his hands just then to note what they were saying, he recognized them as belonging to Mark Winton and Wible.

He could look down into the room now by the side of the portion of wall he was holding, and the effect of what he saw was to make him long to jump through the hole and knock together the heads of the two who were in such close confab.

The voices of Winton and Wible had become inaudible now. The pair seemed to be so interested in what they were saying they had dropped their voices to a whisper.

Suddenly, Winton spoke in his natural tone.

"The old rascal! I should like to have had something to say when he gave that stallion to the girl."

"What would you have said?" asked Wible, with his usual chuckle. "Threatened to knock 'is bloomin' head off, eh?"

"I believe I should have knocked it off. The only satisfaction I have now is in blazing away at his picture."

As he spoke Mark drew a revolver, and pointing straight at the spot where Larry Lang stood peering at him through the crack, the young scoundrel fired at his uncle's *fac-simile*, over the mantel.

"Whew!" thought Larry. "This is getting hot!"

The bullet had gone clear through the wood and canvas that Larry was holding, and had rattled down upon the sheet-iron ladder below.

The young man saw now what had made the small hole that had first attracted his attention, for there was another one by its side, caused by the bullet.

"This must be the old man's picture," said Larry to himself, "and I—"

Another bullet from Mark Winton's pistol whizzed past his ear, and he pulled the picture back into its place and beat a hasty retreat down the iron ladder.

"Bad 'cess to ye!" ejaculated Larry, dropping into brogue for a moment. "Blaze away at the picture if you like, but I will not stay there to be made a target of, if I know it."

Four more shots were fired at the picture in quick succession and then there was a lull.

"He's loading up his pistol now, I suppose. I'll get back and see what is going on."

Larry leaped nimbly up the iron ladder, and displacing the picture, slightly gazed down into the room through the crack.

The parlor was empty!

Larry looked cautiously about the apartment, to make sure that Mark and Winton had really gone, and then, pushing the picture further and further out, he made room for his body to pass through the space.

The picture rested upon a wide, strong shelf which was so nearly full of vases and *bric-a-brac* that Larry could hardly find room for his feet.

Pushing the vases aside, however, he managed to stand upon the shelf while he allowed the pic-

ture to fall back into its place, it being arranged with a spring, so that it did so of its own accord.

Then he leaped lightly to the floor and considered what to do next.

The desk was closed, and the door leading into the house—opposite that communicating with the stone passage—was fastened. The door to the passage, however, was bolted in the room, so that he could easily open it.

Something told Larry where he should find Mark and Wible, and he hastened along the passage.

Reaching the end of it, and mounting an old table that might have been left there by accident, but that Larry knew was there for a purpose, he pushed up a trap in the ceiling, and, with slight exertion, found himself in the old stable before referred to, among the rusty shovels and other lumber.

Picking his way over the rubbish as well as he could, he opened the door and looked out.

He had hardly shown his nose outside when he drew it back with remarkable celerity.

Standing within a few feet, but, fortunately, with their backs to him, were Mark Winton and Wible, looking through the open doorway of the large stable in which Shiloh, the stallion, occupied a roomy loose box.

"Yes, Wible, I must have him. He is of a pure Lexington strain, and it is a shame to let him go to a girl that cannot appreciate his value."

"You're right, Winton. I allers said so, only you would never listen to a cove afore."

Mark took no particular notice of Wible's remark, but making a peculiar chirruping sound, and holding forth his hand toward the doorway, was rewarded with a low whinny from the interior.

"Come, Shiloh!"

As he uttered these words, a magnificent black horse stepped out proudly upon the greensward. A large, powerful beauty, with a small head, upon which the sensitive ears, almost as fine as a lady's, moved backward and forward as he responded to the call of Mark. His limbs were clean and firm, his hoofs small, and his mane and tail long, flowing and fine in texture. His black coat shone like satin.

As he stood there, with the red glow of the setting sun full upon him, Larry Lang could hardly repress a cry of admiration.

"Worth a fortune, if he's worth a bloomin' 'a'penny, I tell you," observed Wible.

Mark stepped up to the stallion and was about to pat his neck, but Shiloh leaped back with a threatening toss of the head, and for a moment glared at the young man in a way that Larry knew meant mischief.

Young Winton laughed nervously, as he stepped aside, but his white face showed that he was thoroughly frightened.

"Don't like you, does 'e?" chuckled Wible. "No accountin' for tastes, don't you know?"

The speech nettled the young man, and seizing a whip that happened to be hanging from a nail just inside the stallion's stable, he whirled it over his head with the evident intention of bringing it down on Shiloh's flank.

Even while the whip was in the air Larry flew out of his concealment and seized Mark Winton's wrist.

The black mustache fairly bristled as Mark demanded in accents choked with anger:

"Where did you come from? What do you mean?"

Larry did not relinquish his hold upon the wrist, as he answered quietly: "I don't want to see yez killed, and sure as yez hit the horse he'd have kicked the brains out of yez, so he would. That's all."

"Guess 'e's right Winton," added Wible, philosophically. "An' that would 'ave put me to inconvenience, don't you see?"

Mark Winton threw the whip to the ground, and turned without a word to Larry, who walked up to Shiloh and whispering a few words to him, led him, docile as a child, into his stable.

"Wible, we must catch that seven train for New York," remarked Winton to his familiar, as they passed toward the house within a yard or two of the stable.

"The seven train to New York, is it?" muttered Larry. "Faith, then, I'll go on that same train, too. You're not smart enough to get the best of Kate Winton while Larry Lang is to the fore."

So when the seven train steamed out of Yonkers, Mark Winton and Wible sat in the smoking-car, while Larry Lang stood upon the platform and watched their every movement through a corner of the window.

CHAPTER V.

KATE FINDS A FRIEND IN BUCK WILLIAMS.

THE fellow with the red beard, the scar on his cheek and the cross-eyes, who frightened Kate Winton so much when he appeared in the back parlor of Ikey Dave's house in the Bowery, seemed to be perfectly at home there.

Moreover, his sense of vision was evidently keener than Kate had given him credit for at first, for a knowing look came into his eyes that told her he had seen her, sitting in the shadow behind the kitchen door.

"Halloa, there!" called out Mark Winton, in a low voice, touching the red-bearded man on the arm.

"Halloa yerself! What's eatin' yer?" was the gruff response.

"Are you here to meet some one about a horse?" asked Mark, controlling a strong desire to crack the skull of the red-bearded man with his cane.

"A horse, you say?"

"Yes."

"What kind of er horse?"

The red-bearded man seemed to be excessively cautious, or was he asking these unnecessary questions merely to gain time?

"What kind of a horse? Why, a live horse! What do you mean?" retorted Winton, impatiently.

"Quite a cunning sort of cove, blow me tight if you ain't," put in Wible, earnestly.

"Wible," whispered Mark.

"Well, w'ot is it?"

"Keep your mouth closed until you are asked to speak, will you?"

"All right, guv'nor; anything you say. But, it do make me so bloomin' mad—"

A savage dig in the ribs from Mark's fist cut short Mr. Wible's grumbling.

"Look hyar! Air you lookin' fer er man by ther name of Buck Williams?" asked the red-bearded man, at this point.

"Yes."

"Well, I'm him!"

"Bartender for Ikey Dave?"

"Yes."

"Then you know what I mean about the horse?"

"Maybe I do, an' maybe I don't. Let me hear yer cackle fer er minute or two, an' I kin tell yer more about it," responded the red-bearded man, cautiously.

"You're a little careful, but perhaps it is just as well," muttered Winton to himself, "but you had better not try to play any dirty tricks upon me, if you know what is good for yourself."

"Beg yer pardon?" growled the man who called himself Buck Williams, and who seemed to be blessed with a remarkably sharp sense of hearing.

"Nothing. I was only coughing," returned Mark.

At this moment a step was heard upon the stairs.

"Quick! The other room!" cried Mark, in an eager whisper. "That is Ikey Dave's step. We must not be seen here."

"Why not?" asked Wible.

"You ass!" hissed Mark Winton, as he pushed Wible, by main strength into the dark hall, just as the footsteps on the stairs, which, fortunately for the conspirators, were heavy enough to drown the noise of the scuffling from one room to the other, sounded so near that they indicated a narrow escape for discovery of Winton and his companions.

As Mark pushed open the door of the front room of the gymnasium, the owner of the footsteps on the stairs stepped into the parlor.

The gymnasium fronting on the Bowery, was light enough from the gas and electric lights outside, for the three worthies to look each other over pretty well.

Mark examined the general appearance of Buck Williams, and appeared satisfied with the result of the inspection, for he exclaimed, almost involuntarily:

"You are just the man we want."

"Just the bloomin' cove," added Wible, who was determined not to be ignored in the conversation.

"Well, what d'ye want me ter do? Shoot it off right away, 'cause I ain't got no time ter monkey. Ther old man 'll be squeelin' for me directly," said Buck, throwing himself upon a stool and picking his teeth with a big knife he took from his right boot.

"I can tell you in a very few words," answered Mark Winton.

"Ther fewer ther better."

"In about six words," said Mark.

"Thet's biz."

"Make it twelve," insinuated Wible.

"Shut yer mouth young feller. Yer shouldn't interrupt when two gentlemen is talkin' 'bout important matters," admonished the red-bearded man, savagely.

"Keep quiet, Wible," added Mark. "Now, Buck Williams, can you keep that horse from Winton Lodge to-night or early to-morrow morning, and keep it safely for me, for as long as I want you to do it?"

"How long?"

"Not more than a few days."

"And what do I git for ther job?"

"A thousand dollars."

"An' when I give the horse ter you arter er few days that ends it for me, eh?"

"Yes, that is all I want of you."

"Fer a thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"All in gold if you like," put in Wible.

"Shut up, will yer?"

"Be quiet, Wible."

"Yes, yer'd better be quiet, Wible, ef yer knows what's good fer yerself," threatened Buck.

"Well, what do you say? Will you do it at that price?" asked Mark.

"Make it fifteen hundred."

"Fifteen hundred?" repeated Mark.

"Oh, crickey! What a covetous cove you are, Buck," squeaked Wible, the irrepressible.

Buck mad a feint as if he would have driven his knife into Wible's chest, and then with a grin of contempt, turned toward Mark and grasping his hand with a clutch of iron, said, huskily:

"Is it a go for fifteen hundred or not?"

"I suppose so," returned Mark.

"No, supposin' won't do me. Say right out, hyar an' now, ef yer mean biz."

"Yes, I will give you fifteen hundred dollars to take the horse Shiloh from Winton Lodge without anybody knowing it, and bring it to New York, where I can take it away."

"Done!"

Buck Williams gave Mark Winton's hand a wrench that nearly dislocated his wrist, and at the same time dealt Wible a slap on the back that knocked the breath out of his lungs and made him gasp again.

"Then you will surely attend to this business, Buck?"

"Ef I say a thing I mean it, an' I don't 'low no man ter doubt my word," was the significant reply.

"No, of course not," said Mark. "Well, then, Wible, we may as well get out, I suppose."

"Hold on, thar. I want ter know one or two things myself," observed Buck.

"What are they?"

"In ther first place, I'd like ter hev somethin' ter bind this hyar bargain."

"How much?"

"Five hundred dollars."

Mark Winton hesitated a moment. Then he said:

"Well, I'll write you a check."

"No check," growled Buck. "Money is what I want."

Mark had foreseen this demand as probable, and had come prepared.

"Very well," he responded, quietly. "Here are greenbacks."

He took from his pocket five one hundred dollar bills, and counted them into the red-bearded man's hand.

"Thet's all right," remarked Buck, carelessly stuffing the notes into his pocket. "Now, thar's another thing: Who's takin' car' of thet thar horse?"

"Oh, you needn't trouble yourself about that. There is a young fellow watching the stable, usually. But I will contrive to have him out of the way when you go up there to do the job."

A curious smile might have been detected under Buck Williams's red beard, as he asked:

"What's his name?"

"Larry Lang."

"Ah! Aiu't been long in the country, hez he?"

"Not very long."

"Sorter tenderfoot?"

"Why, I don't know about that. They called him 'Larry the Thoroughbred' in Ireland, I believe, and he's a pretty sharp fellow. But that does not make any difference. He won't be around the stable when you go there."

"Won't he?"

Again there was the slight smile, so nearly hidden by the red beard that neither Mark or Wible noticed it. Had they done so, they might have had some suspicions as to Buck Williams's good faith.

"So there is nothing to prevent you going to

work quietly and taking the horse away. But where will you take it?"

"Thar is a stable near hyar whar it will be quite safe. You kin come hyar ter-morrer night 'bout this time, an' I'll tell yer whar ther hoss is, an' let yer see it, ef yer want ter see?"

"All right. That will do."

"Wal, then, you'd better git."

Buck Williams turned away from his two companions and walked toward the window in an unceremonious manner as if he were tired of their society.

They took the hint and left the room, and, finding nothing to obstruct their egress, walked softly down the stairs and into the street.

No sooner had they reached the street, than Buck Williams, who had quietly opened one of the windows and put out his head, drew it in and smiled so broadly that his red beard could not hide it.

He seemed to be enjoying a delightful joke, for he dropped upon a stool and rocked himself from side to side, holding his ribs as if he were afraid they would explode with intended laughter.

Not a word did he utter, but from the way he shook his head and guffawed, it could easily have been seen—had any one else been there—that his thoughts were busy, and that he was repeating to himself the conversation he had just had, with various comments that made the whole affair an exquisite jest.

He was still laughing to himself, when the sound of a man's voice in loud, gruff tones, in the adjoining room, fell upon his ear.

Buck stopped laughing, and stepping out into the dark hallway, listened at the door of the parlor for an instant.

He distinguished the tones of Ikey Dave, evidently raised in anger:

"What are yer doin' hyar, you skunk? Why ain't yer down-stairs, attendin' ter yer business? When I want yer up-stairs, in my private part of ther house, I'll tell yer."

Another voice, equally gruff, made a reply that Buck could not distinguish, and then Ikey Dave shouted:

"What! yer'll do ez yer please, will yer? Now, git, 'fore I break yer skull with er poker!"

There was a scuffle, a sound as if a chair had been thrown across the room, a scream from Mary, and then the door was burst open, and a man—the exact counterpart of Buck Williams, red beard, scar on the cheek, Panama hat and all, came flying out before a well-directed blow from Ikey Dave's fist, who appeared in the doorway, sharply defined in the light of the room.

Buck Williams drew out of sight in the shadow, as his double was thus brought into view.

The blow given by Ikey Dave had been a severe one, and it was only by the merest chance that the man who looked like Buck was not sent head-first down the stairs, with a broken neck as the consequence.

As it was, he fell sideways in a heap just at the feet of Buck.

"Now, git ter yer work, yer drunken coyote, or I'll throw yer over the bannisters," yelled Ikey, who was mad with rage.

The other did not say a word, but drawing a bowie-knife, he made a sudden rush that would have ended the quarrel effectually for Ikey—who had turned away after giving the last command—had not Buck rushed forward and seizing the other desperado by the throat, given him a dexterous twist, and sent him whirling and tumbling down the stairs.

As he did so Buck withdrew into the shadow again.

"Ther fool missed his footing, arter all," exclaimed Ikey Dave, adding philosophically, "Wal, he kin afford ter lose a little blood. He's too fresh anyway."

With that he went back into the parlor, leaving Buck Williams outside.

In about ten minutes the door opened again, and Ikey Dave and Kate Winton appeared.

"Wal, now, Miss Kate, I don't like ter let yer go alone."

"Oh, yes, do," pleaded Kate. "It will be better, indeed, I shall be quite safe."

"Wal, of course I don't want ter displease yer in any way, ef you air determined to go back thar ter-night. But I didn't think yer would, yer know."

"No, no, I know. But circumstances have arisen that have changed my plans," returned Kate hurriedly. "Good-by—good-by. I shall most likely be back to see you to-morrow. Good-by."

In her agitation she pushed Ikey Dave back into the parlor and closed the door.

Then she drew herself together with an air of determination and went toward the stairs.

She had just got her foot on the top stair when she felt a hand on her arm, as a voice that she recognized as that of Larry Lang said, in a whisper:

"Don't make a noise, Kate. I am here, and I will see you home."

"Larry," she exclaimed, involuntarily, as the door of the front room—the gymnasium—accidentally blew open, letting a strong ray of electric light fall full upon the figure of—Buck Williams.

"Yes—Larry!" chuckled Buck, as he pulled off his red beard and the Panama hat and revealed the open countenance of the Thoroughbred.

CHAPTER VI.

SHILOH IN BAD HANDS.

It was three o'clock in the morning following the events narrated in the last chapter.

The night was a dark one. The moon had sunk out of sight hours before, and the sudden clouds almost entirely hid the stars that tried to cast their light upon the darkened country above the line where the fitful lights of the city indicated that New York had come to an end.

The Hudson ran quietly along between the gaunt, wood-crowned Palisades on the one side and the gentle slope upon which Yonkers stands on the other.

A feeble glimmer here and there told that it was not an uninhabited town, as one might have supposed otherwise.

Had a stranger made his way by the winding road from the railroad station to Winton Lodge, and walked along the back garden and meadow to the stable in which the black horse, Shiloh, passed his time, he would have found that there were wakeful people around there.

A light shone from the inside through one of the windows high up in the brick wall, carefully guarded by thick iron bars that gave the building the appearance of a small jail rather than a stable.

The light was dim and steady, as if that of a gas-jet turned partly down. The door of the stable was locked, being doubly secured by an iron-barred gate, the full size of the doorway, outside, giving the place still more the appearance of a jail—or, rather, of a large cell inside a prison.

Shiloh sometimes needed air and light when it was not considered safe to leave the inner door open in the temporary absence of his attendant. It would have taken a smart fellow, well-supplied with burglars' tools, to make his way into Shiloh's stable when that iron-barred gate was closed and secured.

Two stealthy figures were moving silently about the outside of the stable on this dark, early morning, while a third might have been seen leaning lazily against the gate that led from the garden.

"Curse him! What is he doing in there?" whispered one of the two figures, as he gently tried to pull open the barred gate.

"Guess he's sleeping, Mark," observed the other, in a bantering tone.

"You're a fool, Wible!"

"Am I?"

"Yes; if it hadn't been for you this fellow would have been away in New York now, instead of in that stable, to upset all our plans."

"The bloomin' chump! I'd ha' discharged 'im if I'd been you, yesterday. That's w'ot I'd ha' done."

"That will all come in time. But if you had not prevented our coming back from New York at the time I wanted to, I could have sent him away. As it was, he was home and locked up in this stable before we got back."

"Well, I know I was a bloomin' gilly, but I didn't know it then. 'Sides, we wanted to tell that cove, Buck, over agin', to make sure of 'im."

"Yes; that is true. The infernal thief! He said I had not given him anything, and had not explained anything about the horse, and I had to tell him the whole story over again."

"Yes, 'e's a bloomin' cute 'un, 'e is."

"He not only made me tell him all I wanted him to do, over again, repeating everything that I had told him half an hour before, but he insisted upon \$2,000 for the job, and \$500 cash in hand."

"The bloomin' thief!"

"He talked so earnestly, and denied so emphatically that he had seen me in the gymnasium that I should have believed him if he hadn't asked me to discredit the evidence of my own senses."

Mark Winton spoke musingly, as he looked at the figure leaning against the gate-post, which

he could just make out in the gloom. He was trying to make himself understand something that was utterly inexplicable.

After leaving the person he believed to be Buck Williams up-stairs in Ikey Dave's house, Mark Winton and Wible had walked away, intending to take the next train from the Grand Central Depot for Yonkers. Then Wible, impelled by some power that he could not explain, had insisted upon Mark Winton going back to see Buck Williams again. They did so, after considerable opposition on the part of Mark. They found the real Buck on the Bowery, walking along thoughtfully, as he tried to think how he could get even with Ikey Dave and the stranger that had thrown him down the stairs. On meeting Mark and Wible, he had not told them about his encounter with Dave—pride kept his mouth shut—but he indignantly denied that he had accepted the Shiloh job or received five hundred dollars deposit. The reader knows that he told the truth. The result of the mix-up is explained in the whispered conversation between Mark Winton and Wible in the shadow of the black stallion's stable.

Mark Winton tossed his head impatiently, as if he would throw off the puzzle by the movement, and once more looked cautiously about him to make sure, if possible, that there were no curious people trying to watch what was going on.

He could just distinguish the form of Buck Williams leaning against the gate, looking preternaturally large in the darkness, but except Wible, who was poking about in an aimless manner waiting for developments, there was evidently no one else in the vicinity.

"Wible," he whispered.

"W'ot?"

"Call him over."

"All right."

"Easily."

"I'm fly."

"Don't make a noise."

"D'ye think I'm a bloomin' muff?"

As Wible croaked this question he stooped, with his hands on his knees, and emitted a sound like that of a very timid, cautious cat, calling a friend at midnight.

"Me-e-e-ow!"

Buck Williams immediately walked toward them.

"Ow's that, Mark?" croaked Wible, with a grin.

But Mark Winton was in no mood for nonsense. He saw that Wible had attracted the attention of the tough bartender, and he did not care how it had been done.

"Wal, what now?" growled Buck, as he joined the other two. Is this hyar thing ter be done, or ain't it? I don't propose ter stay hyar all night ketchin' cold. I hev ter take care uv my constitution."

"There is nothing to wait for, if you can get the horse out of the stable," answered Mark, coldly.

"Git him out? Wal, you bet I kin git him out ef you tell me ter go ahead."

"I do tell you to go ahead."

"All right. Then the fu'st thing fer you ter do is ter git out uv this. I don't want no one botherin' me when I am doin' business."

"But—"

"Git, I tell you—you an' thet dried up mummy with you, or I'll drop ther contract right hyar," interrupted Buck Williams, savagely.

"Come, Wible," commanded Mark, touching his familiar on the shoulder. "There's sense in what he says. We don't want to be seen in connection with this matter, and we cannot help him."

Wible did not answer, but followed Winton into the old stable filled with rubbish, but which, as we know, gave access to the mansion by means of the long passage leading into the back parlor.

"Good!" growled Buck to himself, as they disappeared. "Now, I kin do something."

He drew a tin match-box from his pocket, and lighting a match, examined the iron-barred gate of the stable closely.

"Jist what I thought!"

A long wire was next produced from one of the pockets of his sack coat, which the owner manipulated in a delicate sort of way like a man that was familiar with fine tools. He turned and twisted it in his fingers in the darkness, passing his thumb over the hook at one end, and nodding his head, as if to express his satisfaction.

Then he passed the hooked end into the key-hole, and, with a dexterous turn, shot back the lock.

"So far, all right," he muttered, as he replaced

the wire in his pocket and drew from the inside of his coat something in a small leathern case.

The something turned out to be three pieces of steel, like very short pokers. In his nimble fingers the three pieces became one, fitting into each other like the joints of a fishing-rod, the whole being a powerful instrument, bent slightly at one end, known to the shady fraternity and police as a "jimmy."

The operations of Buck had been perfectly noiseless. Even now, although the jimmy was brought into contact with the iron bars of the door it did not betray its presence by so much as a squeak or a rattle.

"Them thar bolts air good ones, but I kin shove 'em back ez easy ez if—"

He broke off his muttered soliloquy to put considerable pressure upon one end of his steel implement, the other being wedged against the knob of a bolt near the top of the gate inside.

The bolt gave, and then he applied the jimmy to that at the bottom of the gate, with equal effectiveness.

He still held the jimmy in his left hand as he pulled the gate open and tried the door.

"Locked, uv course. I hopes ez he ain't got it bolted inside. Ef he hez I'll hev to saw out er panel, an' thet's er dangerous ez well ez er long job."

A minute's work with the bent piece of wood solved the problem of the lock, and then he gently turned the handle, and pushed.

The door opened!

Buck satisfied himself that he could enter the stable, and then stopped. He had pushed the door only about an inch, but that was enough to enable him to see a man lying upon a cot, fully dressed, in one corner of the place, with the feeble light of the lowered gas-jet full upon his upturned face.

Buck took his jimmy in his right hand, and waited a moment.

The man on the cot was evidently in a deep slumber. He was breathing regularly and deeply, and the one arm that had fallen over the side of his bed hung limp and motionless, in the attitude that told of the sleep of actual exhaustion.

Larry Lang had had a fatiguing day and evening of it, and had given way entirely, when, an hour before, he had flung himself upon the cot—to think. He had determined not to go to sleep, of course, although he felt secure, with the door and iron-barred gate fastened, and the iron bars at the high window rendering it practically impossible for any one to enter that way.

Had he managed to keep awake, this narrative would undoubtedly have taken a different direction.

Slowly and cautiously Buck Williams pushed the door wider and wider, and made his way into the stable, never removing his gaze from the sleeping Larry.

"Ef he wakes I'll make his head ache," thought Buck, "but I'd rather not do it. I like ter do things peacefully an' quietly, ef I kin." Larry Lang slept like a log.

Buck Williams looked about the stable.

"Ah, my beauty! There you air! Right hyar. Clean an' slick ez er new double-eagle!"

Cautiously he stepped forward and entered the compartment in which a beautiful black horse, with flowing mane and tail, was standing, without any restraining halter to keep him in position. A light iron chain that the powerful animal could have snapped as easily as if it had been of packthread, had he so desired, was thrown across the stall, and linked into hooks. This Buck removed as he went toward the head of the horse.

"Whoa, Shiloh! Whoa, beauty!" he whispered in the stallion's ear, as he saw the wide-open inquiring look in the large clear eyes, and noticed the slight quiver that told of the high-strung animal's surprise and doubt.

Shiloh, gradually reassured by the soothing whisper, dropped his head until Buck could stroke the glossy neck, and bring the horse to a state of perfect tractability.

Still Larry Lang slept on.

Buck Williams reflected for a moment.

"I've got ter git him out uv hyar without any noise, an' I've got ter git him out quick. That's sure."

It was no time for hesitation. Hanging immediately above the head of Larry were a saddle and bridle, while a stout riding-whip lay on the floor by the side of the cot within reach of the young man's hand.

Stepping lightly as a cat, Buck Williams possessed himself of the saddle and bridle, and put them on Shiloh without any noise save the occasional subdued jingle of a buckle or the

wheeze of leather as a strap was pulled through and adjusted.

Shiloh, well-trained and obedient, remained perfectly still during the operation, only looking wonderingly at the man busy about his accouterments, as if he would like to have known what it all meant.

"Now, Larry Lang, I guess we'll leave yer," chuckled Buck Williams, below his breath, as he possessed himself of the riding-whip, and held it for a moment over the face of the sleeper, as if half inclined to knock his brains out.

If he had any such intention, however, he changed his mind. Taking the bridle in his hand he led Shiloh through the doorway into the outer darkness.

Then, with a whoop of triumph that he could not repress, he flung himself upon the back of the thoroughbred, and dashing through an open gate on the left that led him directly into the winding road, rode away at the top speed of the splendid animal.

CHAPTER VII.

A RACE AND A WRESTLE.

BUCK WILLIAMS did not slacken his speed until he had put at least two miles between himself and the stable of Winton Lodge.

He had rattled through the quiet streets of Yonkers so quickly that the few people who happened to be awake, and those who were awoke by the noise of flying hoofs, had no time to reach their windows before the black stallion had disappeared in the darkness.

Up and down the hills that lie between Yonkers and New York dashed the black stallion and his reckless rider. The morning was blacker than ever, although in another half hour Buck knew the first streak of dawn would be visible above the eastern horizon.

But the desperado knew every inch of his ground, and had made his calculations too well to be disturbed by the fear of daylight arriving and upsetting them.

He had reached the foot of a long hill, between wheat-fields that stretched away for half a mile or so on either side, being separated from the narrow road by snake fences, with an occasional stretch of wood for a few rods.

It was as lonely a spot as if it had been in the middle of a Western prairie.

Here he drew up, and dismounting, examined Shiloh, to see how he had stood the ordeal.

The stallion was in a foam, and his heaving flanks told that the terrible pace over the rough country had been trying to him.

"Poor feller! Taken ther wind out uv yer, sure ez shootin', ain't it?" muttered Buck, as he took a gaudy silk handkerchief from one of his pockets, and wiped the horse's neck. "Wish I could let yer rest a little, but— Ah! What's that?"

Buck had paused in his remarks, and was listening intently to something in the distance that had caught his quick ear.

It was the steady, measured thump—thump—thump of a horse at full speed.

An expression of determination became more and more pronounced upon the countenance of Buck Williams as he listened.

"Comin', thet's sure. I wonder—"

He was straining his hearing so intently that he could not allow himself even to talk to himself inwardly. The thump—thump—thump was coming nearer and nearer, steadily as remorseless fate.

At this moment he saw a thin line in the sky in the east, that relieved the blackness by the merest trifle.

"Mornin's comin', by ginger!" he muttered. "I must get out uv this, whoever ther feller is behind me."

He walked around Shiloh, who was now pawing the earth as if he had had all the rest he wanted, and was eager to start again. Tightening the girths, and patting him on the neck, Buck sprung into the saddle again and commenced the ascent of the long hill in front of him.

The galloping horse behind was much nearer now, and its pace had never slackened since Buck first heard the tramp of the hoofs in the distance.

Buck would not force the stallion to run up the hill before him. He had that love for horses that we often see in men who have very little consideration for their own kind. He would rather have risked his life in a contest with a man, than make the black horse run up the hill after being so desperately urged before.

"I've got ter reach ther shanty afore he knows whar I am, thet's sure," was Buck's inward comment. "Ther feller behind me is thet

thar kid who wuz in ther stable. It can't be no one else. I wuz er durned fool to yawp like thet when I rode out, but I couldn't help it. Seemed so much like old times at er round-up on ther plains."

By this time he had reached the brow of the hill, and looking back he saw, on the top of that down which he had galloped ten minutes before, the figure of a horse and man, clearly defined against the streak of daylight that had now widened and turned from gray to a brown red.

"Now, beauty, git up the hill!" he muttered, as he felt involuntarily for the bowie-knife that was stuck in his belt, hidden by the sack-coat. "I don't want ter meet thet feller ef I kin help it, 'cause it will mean trouble, sure ez I'm alive now."

There was an ugly, snarling look about the wide mouth, hidden by the red beard, that told of murder in Buck Williams's heart, and it indicated that it would be better if he and the man galloping on behind him so steadily were not to meet.

By this time the gallant black stallion had gallantly breasted the hill, and was making good time under the skillful urging of his rider.

"'Fraid I can't make it!" soliloquized Buck, below his breath. "Thet feller is comin' down ther hill like er streak."

It was much lighter now. The darkness had turned to a foggy gray, and when Buck looked back this time, he was able to confirm what he had supposed—that his pursuer was none other than Larry the Thoroughbred.

"Git up, Shiloh! Git up, beauty! We can't afford ter be caught jist yit!" cried Buck, now thoroughly excited, as he saw how rapidly Larry was gaining upon him.

It must be remembered that Larry had the advantage of coming down hill, while Buck Williams was mounting another. Larry had a wiry-looking bay horse under him—a good animal enough, but not to compare with Shiloh in either endurance or speed.

Along swept the two horses. Shiloh was working with the persistence and courage of the true Kentucky thoroughbred. Every pressure of his rider's knee, every touch of his heel, every slight movement of his hand on the bridle-rein, was responded to with a quickened pace. Horse and man were in perfect accord. Buck Williams understood horses in their every mood and habit, and he and Shiloh were as much parts of one machine as if the red-bearded man with the Panama hat were the most virtuous individual under the sun. It is a mistake to suppose that animals instinctively turn toward a good man, and shrink from a bad one. The opposite is the case, very often.

The two riders were now so close that they could easily have talked to each other. But they didn't. The breathing of their horses and the patter of their hoofs were the only sounds that broke the stillness of the morning, that had now fairly broken, although the white mist was thickening and rendering things almost as obscure as when it was many shades darker.

"Ef I kin only reach the crib afore he sees me go in, I don't care," thought Buck. "I'd rather not hurt the feller. Killin' er man is a risky matter hyar in ther East, an' I don't want ter do it ef I kin help it. But, I'm goin' ter hav' this hyar hoss fer the men ez is payin' me, an' if this hyar young squirt ketches me, why—"

He did not finish the sentence in his mind, but he felt for the half of his bowie-knife again with the significant snarl that meant murder.

Larry Lang on his wiry bay had reached the bottom of the hill now and was galloping along the narrow valley before, mounting on the other side.

Buck Williams chuckled as he saw that Shiloh had carried him to the top of the hill and that he would have a straight run along the smooth road before him while the bay horse was toiling up the ascent.

A few more steps and Shiloh was on the level ground.

"Now, my beauty, show 'em yer heels," whispered Buck, encouragingly, as he gave a gentle tug at the rein and pressed his knees warningly into Shiloh's sides.

No need to urge the stallion!

He flew over the level road as if enjoying the exercise, and soon the mist completely hid the trees and fences at the brow of the hill.

Buck Williams knew that he was safe from Larry Lang for the present, if no accident happened. By the time the boy reached the top of the hill, the black stallion could be far enough away.

Buck was riding along as if he had no

thought save to get to New York City as soon as possible.

Suddenly he stopped and looked carefully at the snake fence on his right. An immense poplar towered above him just inside the fence, and as he looked intently beyond he could distinguish a low building that looked like a barn sunk in the earth—one of those places in which nursery gardeners keep their choice plants through the winter safe from the effects of frost and other enemies of aristocratic horticulture.

"Thar's ther crib. Thought I knew whar it war, even though I haven't been thar fer er year."

As he spoke, Buck turned the stallion to the other side of the road, and started him diagonally at the fence.

The noble animal cleared it at a bound as lightly as a deer.

For a moment Buck drew up and listened.

"Ah! he's er-comin', but I think he'll be fooled this time. Ef he kin find me he's welcome ter ther hoss," muttered Buck, with a satisfied grin.

He dashed away over the stubbly ground till he came to a patch of wood, in which the undergrowth was so thick as to make it appear impossible for even a boy to get among the trees.

Buck did not hesitate, however. He evidently knew the place.

With one sweep of the heavy riding-whip he carried, he had pushed aside a quantity of shrubbery that had appeared to be growing, but that when thrust out of the way revealed that they had been ingeniously arranged to deceive the careless eye, and were easily removable.

Buck did not even take the trouble to dismount, but, having cleared the way partly, let the stallion do the rest with his head and shoulders.

There was a slight rustling, but the brush was so loose and light that it hardly scratched either Shiloh or his rider, and the next moment they were in an open space among the trees, a space so wide that there was plenty of room for Buck to maneuver his horse in any way he pleased.

Leaping from his back, the desperado quickly replaced the underbrush, and it would have taken a keen eye to discover that it had ever been moved, and was not growing solidly from the ground.

"Now, beauty, we are safe!" he cried, exultantly as he took the bridle in his hand and led Shiloh among the trees toward a bank that overhung the glade through which they were walking.

This bank ran along the edge of the road opposite that at which Buck had entered, and was surmounted by a fence thickly overgrown with shrubbery, of that thorny nature that makes it least likely to be troubled by mischievous boys or predatory tramps. It formed a perfect *chevaux de frise* on that side, and the wood was, by it, as thoroughly screened from observation as from intrusion.

The bank seemed to be of red sandy clay of a yielding nature, and one might have wondered why Buck Williams walked Shiloh up to it and stood gazing at it reflectively.

Only for a moment did he hesitate. The soft, red soil crumbled and fell in fragments as he dug the handle of his whip into it here and there. The handle sunk six or eight inches into the bank, and, apparently, would have buried its whole length had Buck cared to push it.

"Um!" he mused. "I haven't forgot ther place, hev I?"

He poked and poked in different parts of the bank, and then, his face brightened. He found that something hard stopped the whip at the depth of two or three inches.

He threw down his whip, and with his bare hands began scraping the soil out like children digging holes for a game at marbles.

The reason of his action was soon apparent. He had not taken away more than half a dozen handfuls of the red clay and sand when a rough board was revealed. He worked away, and it could be seen that the rough board was part of a door, on which slats were nailed across, so as to hold the soil, and prevent it slipping down and away.

"Funny! This hyar crib hasn't been opened fer a year, an' yet I kin git inter it ez easy ez ef I hed been livin' in it fer the last twelve months, instead uv bein' down in New York, slingin' beer fer a livin'!"

Mr. Williams was in high good humor now, and he grinned so continuously that the red beard was knocked all out of shape.

Seizing one of the slats, he gave it a sharp tug and the door opened enough to permit of his

placing his fingers in the crack and pulling the door wide open.

A wide, dark passage some seven feet in height, faced him.

"Come, Shiloh."

The gentle, yet spirited animal obeyed the call at once.

"Go in!"

Shiloh nodded his head and shook his mane proudly, and then with a playful kick-up of his heels, dashed into the opening.

"Go on, my beauty. You can't lose yerself. It's er straight road."

Still grinning, Buck Williams placed his hand on the edge of the open door to shut it after him from the inside of the cave.

This was his intention, but, unfortunately for him, it was frustrated.

He was already half-way through the doorway, and had pulled the door partly to, when something came upon him all of a heap, and, as two sinewy hands forced him upon his back, a knee dug into his chest, as a low voice hissed in his face:

"You're a scoundrel, be jabbers!"

CHAPTER VIII.

VILLAINY SCORES A POINT.

FOR a second Buck Williams lay looking up into the blue eyes that flashed under dark lashes with stern determination.

"Wal, who air you?" demanded the desperado as well as he could, for it was not easy to speak with a knee pressed into his chest, and two hands holding his head back.

"Sure, don't you know me now?" asked the other in mocking tones. "That's a mighty strange thing ye are tellin' me. Faith, me name is Larry Lang, an' I'm the mon that owns the horse yez are thyrin' to steal."

Larry laughed as he spoke.

It was an incautious thing for him to do. As he laughed he involuntarily relaxed his hold upon the shoulders of Buck, and his knee loosened its pressure a little.

Like a flash, the desperado, strong as a giant and lithe as an Indian, wriggled from beneath Larry, and with one of those tricks in wrestling that he had practiced hundreds of times before, threw his adversary upon his back, and reversed their positions exactly.

Now Larry Lang was lying flat upon his back, and Buck Williams was kneeling upon his chest, with a firm grasp upon his shoulders that prevented his moving an inch.

"You ain't quite so smart ez yer think yer air, don't yer see?" hissed Buck.

"Oh, I don't know. Be gob, I don't think yez are so mighty smart yer own self," retorted Larry, carelessly.

The young fellow was at a disadvantage, but he had sufficient reliance upon himself to believe that he would get out of his scrape somehow.

Buck frowned savagely, and he thought involuntarily of the bowie-knife in his belt. He could not reach for it, however, even if he had desired to do so, because he knew that if he relaxed his grasp upon Larry for a moment, the chances were that he would find the young man upon him again.

"Now you're hyar, I don't eggzackly know what to do with yer," said Buck, coolly.

"Don't yez? Well, be the powers, I think if ye know what's good for yez ye won't try to do anything," replied Larry, with equal coolness.

The other did not answer. He was thinking.

Larry was thinking, too. He was wondering whether it would not be possible for him to draw the short, serviceable, handy-billy that he carried in one of his hip-pockets, and give Buck Williams a rap with it that would keep him quiet while he rescued Shiloh from this mysterious cavern and restored him to his stable at Winton Lodge.

"And if I ever do get him back, I'd like to see the man that will take him away from Kate again. I'll put a stop to all this fooling, sure as my name is Larry Lang, of Kerry."

"How did yer git hyar?" asked Buck.

"Look over the head of yez, an' perhaps ye can see," answered Larry.

"Ah, yer jumped ther fence thar, did yer?" queried Buck, but without looking up. He had had experience of the young man's strength and agility, and he knew better than to look up, or look anywhere, save at Larry Lang, at that moment.

It was now broad daylight, and, with the coming up of the sun the mist lifted like a curtain, leaving the atmosphere as clear as it can be only on a perfect summer day.

The two foes were looking into each other's eyes, each measuring the strength and purpose of the other. Although Buck Williams had

Larry under him, he dared not make a move of any kind, and was therefore in the position of the soldier who caught a Tartar—he couldn't let go.

How long they might have remained in this position it is impossible to say, had they not been interrupted.

Suddenly a low whinny sounded behind Buck Williams, and he turned his head involuntarily.

He had just time to see that the sound proceeded from the wiry bay horse that Larry had ridden, and that he had not noticed before, having been too busy with Larry, when he found himself turned over on his back once more, and the young Irishman on top of him.

"Faix, I hev yez ag'in!" cried Larry, as he gave the other a playful but hard slap in the face. "You're a blaggard, now, d'ye moind, an' I hev a notion to lick yez till ye are sick, so I hev."

Indeed, he was thinking seriously whether he had not better choke Mr. Williams into a state of insensibility, while he rescued Shiloh and took him back to Winton Lodge, when a tremendous blow descended upon his head from behind, and all became darkness.

"Well, I'll be blowed! If I 'adn't 'a' appened to be 'ere just at this 'ere time, I b'lieve that bloomin' chump 'u'd 'a' rubbed you out," croaked a wheezy voice.

The wheezy voice proceeded from Mr. Wible, who was standing by the side of the unconscious Larry, weighing a stout cudgel in his hand.

"Whar did you come from, durn yer?" was the polite greeting of Buck Williams, as he looked with slight favor at the long nose, blue with the raw morning air, the awkwardly-fitting clothes and the general shambling make-up of Wible. "Whar did you come from, I ask yer?"

"You're a polite cove, I don't think!" returned Wible. "If I 'adn't come from somewhere, I'd like to know what would 'ave become of you?"

"Oh, wal, never mind. Help me git this hyar bird into ther crib. Don't stand thar shootin' off yer mouth 'bout nothin'. Yer make me tired."

But Wible was not to be shut off in that way. "I'll tell you," he commenced. "You see—"

"I don't see nothin' 'cept a durned fool talkin' when he ought ter be doin' somethin'," interrupted Buck, impatiently.

"Well, it was this way," resumed Wible, coolly, and nothing abashed by the unceremonious way in which the other had stopped his flow of conversation.

And then Mr. Wible went on to explain how that he had kept watch upon the proceedings of Buck Williams when he was making his way into the stable at Winton Lodge. How he had seen Buck ride away on Shiloh. How he had already commenced to walk toward the stable, intending to saddle the wiry bay and follow Buck, when he saw Larry Lang, on the back of the identical bay, dash out of the stable, and ride like a fiend after Buck.

"Ah, that wuz ther result of my yelling jist ez I wuz ridin' away from the stable," put in Buck, at this stage of Wible's narrative. "I wuz er durned fool!"

"Was you? Well, I'm glad as I ain't the only bloomin' fool in York State," remarked Wible, with a grin.

Then he resumed his story. He told how he went into the stable as soon as Larry had got clear away, and seized the first horse he came to—a large black animal, with plenty of speed, and the long limbs of a jumper. How he had been unable to find a saddle and bridle, and had therefore ridden him bareback, with a halter, and had kept so close behind Larry that the young man must have heard the sound of his horse's hoofs had he not been riding hard himself, with his attention strained upon the man he was pursuing.

"Wal?" asked Buck, as Wible paused, apparently for breath.

"I followed the bloomin' Irish cove pretty close, and when I see'd 'im turn out of the road an' skirt this wood, I went after 'im. When he leaped 'is 'orse over that jiggered 'igh fence, I waited awhile to see what 'u'd turn up, but, nothin' turned up; so then I just set the black 'orse at the fence, shut my eyes, an' let 'er go."

"Wal?"

"She jumped over that bloomin' fence so easy, I felt as if I was a-settin' in a rockin'-cheer, and I couldn't 'ardly believe I 'ad come down about eight or ten feet. But I 'ad, you know."

"You 'ad, what?" asked Buck, involuntarily dropping an "h" in repeating the words of Wible.

"Jumped into the middle of the bloomin'

wood. I 'ad come down the other side of that clump of trees where I could see what was goin' on without bein' seen."

"Why, yer durned jackass!! [Do yer mean ter say ez you wuz right hyar an' see me er strugglin' an' fightin' with this feller without tryin' ter help me? Do yer?"

"Well, you know—" stammered Wible, taking off his hat and fanning his bald head in his agitation.

"Did yer, I say?"

"Only for a minute. I like to see fightin', but I don't like to be in it myself, if I can 'elp it."

"You durned coward!" interjected Buck Williams.

"Exactly. I guess you're right. 'Owever, when I see that you was likely to get the worst of it, I came along and 'it 'im a thump on 'is bloomin' 'ead with this 'ere stick. An' I think I did it pretty well," added Wible, as he stooped to examine Larry, to make sure that he was not actually killed.

"Oh, 'e's all right. Just knocked silly for a little while," observed Wible. "What shall we do with 'im?"

"Ketch hold of his legs," commanded Buck, shortly.

Wible stooped and seized Larry's feet, not without some misgivings that he might receive a sudden blow in the stomach from the heels of the young man if he should happen to regain his senses.

Buck took hold of Larry's shoulders, and backed into the cavern, Wible following with considerable trepidation.

The bolder rascal knew the place very well, for, although there were many twists and turnings in the passage, and although they soon found themselves in pitch darkness, he went on his way with perfect confidence, never stumbling or coming into collision with the jagged wall, that bore great knots, or blotches of rock, here and there, as if the passage had been blasted roughly out of the mountain at some time in the past, without being trimmed off afterward.

After perhaps ten minutes of rapid traveling Buck stopped—so suddenly that Wible was unprepared for the stoppage, and doubled up the limp body of Larry, by forcing his shoulders against Buck involuntarily.

"Put him down!" commanded Buck.

Without answering, Wible dropped his end of the young man, and Buck followed his example.

Wible stood still while his companion struck a match and lighted a lantern that hung over his head, with the same air of being thoroughly at home that had distinguished all his movements in this mysterious place.

Wible looked around him when the lantern had lighted up properly, and noted, with his habitual quickness, that he was in a large room, arranged partly as a stable and partly as a habitation.

A manger, with a hay-rack above it, ran along one side. The rack was well supplied with hay, and that there was plenty of feed in the manger was evidenced by the contented manner in which Shiloh was munching away, only lifting his head once to regard Buck and Wible lazily when the lantern was lighted. Blankets, whips, two saddles and bridles, and the various implements—brushes, scrapers, sponges, etc.—used in a horse's toilet, lay on a wide shelf at one end of the room, while a spring of clear water trickled from a crevice in the rock into a rough stone basin below, with a sound that was refreshing and soothing at the same time.

There were no stalls for the horses, and Shiloh had the run of the whole apartment.

The other side, at the back of Shiloh, as he stood at his manger, was fitted up in a rude manner for men's habitation. Two cots, that might have been made up with their warm blankets and rough sheets that very morning, stood in the corner. One of the cots was occupied by Larry, who was breathing heavily now, and evidently beginning to regain consciousness. A table, with a coffee-pot, cups and saucers, plates, and a very stale and moldy loaf of bread stood near the cots, while an oil-stove at one side, and a barrel of flour, with another of sugar, gave token that regular housekeeping had been carried on in this mysterious place at some time or other.

There were no windows and no doorways to be seen save that by which Buck Williams and Wible had entered carrying Larry Lang.

"Now, we'll git out uv this," observed Buck.

"But I have one thing ter say ter you, friend."

"What is it?" asked Wible mechanically, for he was completely overcome with surprise at finding himself where he was.

"Just this," returned Buck Williams fiercely

as he thrust his red-bearded face into that of the trembling little man. "Don't you never give away ter no one that you hev ever seen this hyer place, or that you know thar is sech er place. If yer do, yer'll hev ther worst gang down on yer that yer ever see'd, an' yer life won't be worth *that*!"

Buck snapped his huge fingers in Wible's face as he spoke, and the other started back and sat down with considerable force upon Larry Lang's chest.

"The bloomin' fool! What is 'e doin' of?" exclaimed Wible, digging Larry in the side with his cudgel, which he had carried under his arm all the time he had been helping to carry the young man along the passage.

"You wouldn't dare ter do that, if ther feller wuz at himself," said Buck contemptuously.

"Maybe not," grinned Wible. "But 'e can't say nothin' now."

Buck Willaims leaned over Larry and looked at his face closely.

"He'll come to after a while, but he doesn't know whar he is now. It's safe enough to leave him. He can't git out, an' he's sure ter take good care uv ther hoss. That's all I want of him now."

Without another word, Buck shoved Wible unceremoniously through the doorway into the passage, and following him, shut the heavy wooden door and locked and bolted it, placing the rusty key belonging to it in his pocket.

No sooner was the door shut and fastened than Larry Lang sprung from his cot and shook his fist in the direction of the departing Buck and Wible.

"I wasn't quite so badly gone as you thought," he exclaimed, laughing. "It made my head ache for a while, but I'll eucher you yet. I would rather be shut up here with Shiloh, than be shut out. I'll try and prove to you, yet, that I am still worthy of the title given to me in far-away County Kerry—Larry the Thoroughbred."

CHAPTER IX.

KATE IN THE TOILS.

It was the morning that Larry Lang found himself a prisoner in the secret stable, in company with the black horse Shiloh, but several hours after the events narrated in the last chapter, that Mark Winton sat in the back parlor at Winton Lodge, busy at his desk.

He was turning over his papers, and had just opened the secret compartment in which he had hidden the last will of his uncle—the will that gave everything to Kate Winton.

He read the will over again for the hundredth time, and stood, irresolutely holding it, as if half inclined to destroy it. Then shaking his head, he replaced it in the secret recess, closed the desk, and touched an electric button.

"My compliments to Miss Kate, and I should like to see her in the parlor," he said briefly to the well-trained English flunkey who answered the ring.

"Yessir! Himmediately, sir."

Five minutes later Kate Winton entered the parlor. There she found Mark Winton seated negligently by the open window, looking out at the trees and flowers with as peaceful an expression upon his face as if he had nothing dark upon his soul.

He arose as Kate entered, and ceremoniously placed a chair for her.

She sunk into it wearily but gracefully, and waited for her cousin to speak.

"Kate—" he began, and hesitated.

She looked at him inquiringly.

"The fact is, Kate," he went on after a pause, during which he went through a well-acted pantomime of pretending to try and control his emotions, "I love you."

Kate smiled disdainfully.

"Yes, I know you do not believe me. But I do love you, Kate, and I want you to let me show that I do."

"In what way?"

"Only by making you as happy as it is in my power to do. This is your home now, so I cannot tell you that I want you to be mistress here. That would only be offering you a position you already hold. But I do want to show in some way that your happiness is dearer to me than aught else. I—"

She stopped his passionate declaration with the cold question:

"Do you really wish to please me?"

"Yes—yes! Oh, yes!"

Kate Winton raised her hand in a deprecatory way to stay this torrent.

"I will tell you how you can please me," she said, quietly.

"How?"

"By simply letting me alone."

"Kate!"

"Yes. We may meet sometimes, but we need not be more than strangers to each other. As soon as I can make arrangements I will leave this house."

"Kate!"

"As for your protestations of love, they would be distasteful to me if they were sincere. As they are not, they simply provoke my contempt."

"Kate!"

"Good-morning, Mr. Winton!" and, she was gone.

For a few seconds Mark Winton sat in the chair into which he had dropped after giving his cousin a seat, and scowled at the door as if he would have stricken her dead through it.

He was baffled completely by this delicate young girl, and he knew it.

Suddenly he started up, rushed through the curtained opening into the back room, opened his desk and the secret compartment, and snatched the will from its hiding place.

"Now, Kate Winton!" he hissed. "I'll put it out of your power ever to interfere with my fortune. You fool! You might have had entire control of this beautiful house. But now—"

He had lighted a match, and held it to the corner of the will, that he had opened out to its full size.

The flames had already caught the lower part of the paper, and would soon have converted the whole document into ashes, when a hand came from behind Mark Winton, tore the paper from his grasp and put out the fire all in one swift, comprehensive movement.

Like a flash Mark turned and grappled with the intruder, before he knew who it was.

Then he cast him off scornfully with:

"So it's you, is it, with your idiotic tricks? Wible, give me that paper!"

But, Wible had already hidden the will in an inside breast-pocket, and it was quite evident that he intended to keep it there, for he hastily drew a six shooter, and pointing it at Mark, exclaimed, in excited tones:

"No, yer don't, partner! No, yer don't! You ain't goin' ter bullyrag me, if other people does. I ain't afraid of you. That will belongs to me as much as it does to you, and jigger me if I don't keep it a bit now. That's what I'll do."

Wible was jumping about the room like a hideous big doll worked by a string, and would have been laughable had he not been so terribly in earnest.

"You're a fool, Wible. What good would it do you to bring that will forward? And unless you intended to do some such trick as that, there is no use in your keeping it."

"Praps not. But I'll keep it all the same."

Wible still held his revolver pointed at Mark Winton, while he kept his left hand over the place where his breast-pocket held the precious will.

"Put that infernal pistol away, will you, you fool! You'll pull the trigger accidentally directly, and then—"

"Mind I don't pull it a-purpose!"

"You wouldn't dare!"

"Wouldn't I? You come over that flower in the carpet by the side of the big chair," replied Wible, pointing with his pistol at a certain spot in the pattern of the carpet, and then bringing his weapon back with a jerk till the muzzle was on a line with Mark's forehead, "and I'll show you what I dare. Don't you bank on my bein' afraid to shoot, or you might get a 'ole bored through your 'andsome carcass in a bloomin' pig's whisper."

"So you're goin' to keep the will?"

"I am."

"You're a rascal."

"Yes, but not a fool."

"Keep the will," continued Mark, resignedly.

"I'm a-goin' to."

"It would be safer in the secret recess in my drawer."

"Praps so, but I won't trust it there. I'll keep it my own self, an' then, when I want it, I'll know where to find it."

"Very well."

"You see, I'll 'ave a pull on you all the time, and if you try to do any dirt on me, I'll 'ave only to tell Miss Kate that I can make 'er the owner of this fine place, and—"

"And have your miserable life crushed out while you were speaking," interrupted Mark Winton, fiercely, as he sprung forward.

Wible flourished the pistol in the young man's face, as he answered, mockingly:

"My life ain't worth very much, but you can't 'ave it. I'm a-goin' to keep it, so that if I find it worth my while I can tell Miss Kate there is another will, and that if she only

knew it she could own Winton Lodge, and turn you out. She—"

"Does know it," broke in a clear voice, and Kate Winton stood in the middle of the parlor, flashing defiance at the two conspirators from her glorious blue eyes.

For a moment the two men stood dumfounded. Then, as Mark Winton made a step toward her, Kate put out her hand commandingly, so that he stopped involuntarily.

"Back, Mark Winton! I have heard all your conversation with your miserable hireling there, and I know now that my uncle left me mistress of this place, and not you!"

"'Ere I say, I ain't a 'ireling, you know!" grumbled Wible.

"Silence, you fool!" cried Mark, peremptorily. Then, to Kate: "You're mistaken. I—"

But Wible, pushing him aside, interrupted him in his remarks, and the next moment had seized Kate around the waist, and stuffing a handkerchief into her mouth, had carried her, despite her struggles through the doorway that led into the underground passage before referred to, the door closing behind him with a spring.

"A bold game! But perhaps the best, under the circumstances," muttered Mark, as he prepared to follow Wible and the girl.

When Wible found himself in the passage he hesitated a moment, with Kate still in his arms. Although he was not a big man, and was not blessed with much personal courage, he had a great deal of strength. He made no more of carrying Kate Winton into this passage than if she had been a child.

"Now, what shall I do with her?" he thought. "I don't want to hurt her, but I've got to keep her quiet for a while, or she'll spoil everything."

A sudden idea struck him.

As the reader knows, Wible knew as much about the arrangements of Winton Lodge as any one, and perhaps more than most people.

Still holding Kate—who had fainted—in his arms, he placed his finger on the small steel knob on the stone wall, and swung back the section of wall that guarded the entrance to the secret chamber in which, as we know, Larry Lang had found himself on the night before, and from which he had managed to escape into the back parlor through the picture of old Winton.

Wible allowed the mass of stone to swing partly into its place, but it was stopped by Mark Winton, who had followed, and who now stepped into the space between the door and the rest of the wall.

"What are you doing, Wible?" he demanded.

"Makin' things safe. You can 'elp me, if you like. Shut that there door."

Mark obeyed, and the three were in pitch darkness.

Only for a moment, however. There was a click, and a door opened at the extremity of the place, revealing a spiral flight of stairs that were illuminated in some way by daylight from above.

Without a word, Wible began to climb these stairs, with Kate in his arms, followed closely by Mark.

There were a good many stairs, and Wible paused to rest several times when he had nearly arrived at the top.

At last he found himself in a large, well-lighted room, circular in form, with four large windows, from which could be obtained good views of the surrounding country—one of them revealing the roofs and spires of New York, that on this beautiful clear morning seemed almost at their feet.

Outside the windows ran a castellated parapet, some two or three feet wide, upon which one could step from the casements if he were disposed to risk giddiness and a headlong plunge of eighty feet to the lawn below.

The room was comfortably furnished as a bed-room and sitting-room combined. There was an old-fashioned bedstead, with expensive hangings, faded by age but still handsome, two or three huge easy-chairs of ancient date, and one modern rocker of the description known as a lady's sewing-chair, a solid mahogany table, a book-case well supplied with literature of all kinds, from the lightest fiction to the most solid scientific works, and an old-fashioned stove, through the open door of which could be seen paper, wood and coal, as if some one had arranged it ready for lighting only the day before.

One object must be particularly mentioned, and that was a large telescope in a sort of glass case in the ceiling—or rather above it—that worked on a swivel in all directions, and that

was reached by a light iron spiral staircase ending in a platform, where there was a comfortable chair for the use of any one who might be disposed to study the stars at night or view the country in the day.

"This 'ere's comfortable enough. She oughtn't to grumble at this 'ere," croaked Wible, as he laid the unconscious Kate upon a sofa and looked around him.

Mark Winton did not answer. He went to a spigot that protruded above a stationary washstand in the corner, and turning it, allowed a stream of water to run until, that in the pipes having been all drawn, it came clear and cool. Then he filled a tumbler and sprinkled the water upon Kate's face, until with a slight shiver she opened her eyes and slowly awoke to a realization of this world.

"Now, come out; you don't want 'er to see you 'ere," whispered Wible, seizing Mark by the elbow and pulling him toward the staircase.

In another minute both the men had descended the staircase, pulling down a heavy trap-door and fastening it securely with bolts on the lower side.

CHAPTER X.

A MIDNIGHT RACE.

It is night again, and the scene has shifted to New York City.

Buck Williams, in his shirt-sleeves, is standing behind the bar of Ikey Dave's saloon in the Bowery.

There is a motley crowd in the room, which is more of a variety theater than a saloon.

Chairs and tables are crowded together, and most of them are occupied. A stage at the extreme end of the long apartment is fenced off from the audience by two ropes stretched across the front, the top one at about the height of a man's chest.

The reason of this fencing off can be seen now, for there are two light-weight pugilists trying to vanquish each other, and at this moment both the men—or boys, for they are nothing more—are lying against the ropes with all their weight, and were there no protection would undoubtedly tumble over into the orchestra head-first.

There is a great deal of noise, for this has been an exciting contest throughout, and there is every probability that one of the young fellows on the ropes will be strangled unless they are separated.

Fortunately, they are separated, for as some one calls "Time!" in a commanding voice, two gentlemen with short hair, and tempers to match, rush on from opposite sides of the stage, and pull the combatants apart by main strength.

The noise and excitement consequent upon these proceedings are at their height, as Mark Winton, cool and unconcerned in demeanor, followed by Wible, whose long nose twitches with excitement, and whose clothes seem to be tighter than ever, walk into the place and lean over the bar, in front of Buck Williams.

"Well, Buck?" inquiringly from Mark.

"Wal?"

"Ow is things, don't you know?" puts in Wible.

"You shet up!"

Buck turned upon the little man so fiercely that the sheepish young man, Cooley, who it will be remembered was training for his fight with Thunderbolt Higgins, and who happened to be passing the bar at that moment, looked from beneath his fur cap in surprise, ere he resumed his stroll to a position near the stage.

Without another word Buck Williams came from behind the bar, and beckoning his two companions to follow, walked negligently up the aisle in the center of the room, and then, squeezing between the front row of chairs and the orchestra, entered a narrow door on one side of the stage, and found themselves in the wings, from where they could see the two light-weights hammering away at each other with hearty good-will, and with much scuffling and ducking of heads.

"Hyar. Come this way," growled Buck.

He turned into a little three-cornered room, with low ceiling and whitewashed walls, a shelf along one side, on which stood a fragment of looking-glass that had lost most of its quicksilver, and which was smeared with grease-paint of different colors.

Buck lighted a gas-jet in a wire cage and closed the door. In five minutes the little den was insufferably hot, for there was no window and no means of ventilation.

"Now, ther hoss is all safe. What do yer want me ter do with it?" began Buck.

"Nothing at present," answered Mark, quietly. "Where is it?"

"I know where it is," put in Wible.

"Yes, you know whar it is, but I don't think ez you will dare ter go thar while thet young feller is with it," observed Buck, contemptuously.

"Buck," said Mark, after a few minutes' silence, during which his knitted brows and gaze fixed on vacancy indicated that he was in deep thought.

"Wal?"

"Could you go to Guttenberg and take care of this horse for a few weeks? I have entered him for one of the races there, and he *must* win. You understand?"

"Must he?"

"Yes." Then to himself, "Let me make a go on this horse, and I shall clear a hundred thousand dollars in stakes and bets. Then I shall perhaps be in a position to do the generous thing with Kate and persuade her to marry me. If I lose—Ruin! That is what it will be. The fellow I have borrowed from will descend upon Winton Lodge, and take away every stick I have."

"What are you grumbling about?" asked Wible.

The little man seemed to have some power over Mark Winton that enabled him to treat him with more disdain than he dared show toward any one else.

Mark did not answer Wible, but turning toward Buck, said: "Will you take charge of this horse for me, and see that he is fit to run in the fall meeting?"

"Will yer dare ter do it when ther hoss doesn't belong ter ye?" asked Buck doubtfully.

"I have entered him already in another name. You didn't suppose I was fool enough to advertise him as Shiloh, did you?"

"Dunno. Some uv ther smartest men act like durned fools sometimes," was the gruff reply.

"Well, now. That is all I want to know. Will you do it?"

"Yes."

"You will?"

"I said yes."

"When will you take the horse away? I have already hired a stable at Guttenberg for him, and you can go up there as soon as you like."

"All right."

"But there is one other thing."

"What is it?"

"You must handle this horse yourself."

"What d'yer mean?"

"I mean that you must not have any boys helping you. I do not want any hand but yours to touch him."

Buck Williams placed his hand on the knob of the door as if he was going out, as he shook his head contemptuously.

"That settles it."

"What?"

"Ther bargain. Do you suppose I'm goin' up ter that thar wild place in New Jersey fer you, an' goin' ter make myself a stable boy at ther same time? No, ther deal is off. I'll let yer hev ther hoss whenever you are ready fer it, but you kin git some else to handle it."

"Wait a minute. Don't be in such a hurry. Have you a boy that you can trust?"

"Yes, I hev," replied Buck, surlily.

"Very well. Then you can use him. But I shall hold you responsible for the horse."

"That's all right. I'll take care of him."

"When will you take him to Guttenberg?"

"I'll start to-morrow morning. I'll go down to ther crib he is in, ther other side of Spuyten Duyvil, an' I'll git him ter Guttenberg durin' ther day."

"Good!"

The three men were so much interested in the conversation that they did not notice the gentle turning of the handle of the door, and that some one had been listening to their words for the last few minutes.

The set-to between the light-weights was over, and the curtain had been rung down to prepare for a short farce, while the orchestra hammered away at a very loud march, with plenty of work for drums and cymbals.

The man standing in the corner of the dark stage, listening to the conference in the little dressing-room, was Ikey Dave, proprietor of the place.

He smiled as he heard the last speech of Buck Williams, and there was a clinching of his huge fist that indicated trouble for somebody before very long.

Buck Williams went on: "Thar's one thing you hev'n't mentioned, an' that's ther money I'm ter git fer all this. You'd better pay me the balance on ther \$1,500—\$1,000."

Mark Winton winced, and then drawing out his pocketbook counted out ten one hundred dollar bills into the hands of the desperado.

"I will pay you \$5,000 on the day that you lead Shiloh out to the track in first-class condition, and \$5,000 more for each of the races he wins," said Mark, quietly and distinctly.

"What a lot of bloomin' money," remarked Wible.

"It's er go. That all yer hev ter say?"

"Yes. You'll start with the horse to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"What about that young feller you have in the crib?" asked Wible.

"I'll fix him," replied Buck coolly, as he got up from the chair upon which he had been sitting.

Ikey Dave did not wait to hear any more. He moved swiftly away, and by the time Buck Wible and Mark strolled carelessly down the center aisle again, Dave was busy behind the bar, while the audience, laughing at the antics of a burnt-cork comedian on the stage, had no suspicion that a conspiracy that might end in a murder was in progress under their very noses.

"Dave, I want to take a walk with these hyar friends of mine," remarked Buck, as he put himself into his sack-coat and moved toward the door.

Dave did not answer. He happened to be serving a customer at that moment, and from all that could be seen in his demeanor he neither knew nor cared what business might take Buck Williams out. Although an employee of Ikey Dave's, it was understood that Buck was to have his liberty, in the matter of staying in or going out, so long as he did not presume too much upon the privilege.

"Good-evening, Ikey," said Mark Winton, carelessly, as he strolled out of the place with Buck and Wible.

"Good-evening," cried Ikey Dave. Then in a lower tone: "Cuss yer, fer a scoundrell! So yer hev ther hoss already, hev yer? An' yer hev him in ther crib at Spuyten Duyvil, too! Wal, now, yer think ye'r smart, don't yer, but Dave Donahue knows ez much ez any of yer, an' he'll prove it, afore he's many hours older."

Nodding to one of the two barkeepers at his side to keep watch, Ikey Dave ran up-stairs, dressed himself in a stout sack coat, in the pocket of which was a six-shooter fully charged, picked up a cane, flexible and light, but with about three-quarters of a pound of lead in the harmless-looking basket handle, and pulling his soft-felt hat over his forehead.

In five minutes he stood in a livery stable—a side stable, and two minutes later he was trotting up the Bowery and so on to Fourth avenue, on a black horse that any casual observer would have sworn was Shiloh, the magnificent stallion that we left shut up in an underground stable in the company of Larry Lang, the Thoroughbred.

"I must make it afore they git thar, thet's me," muttered Ikey Dave, as he reached Union Square, and touched his horse with his heel as a reminder to him to move a little faster.

He had reached the upper part of town and was riding along outside the railings of Central Park, when he passed a close carriage, with the blinds down, as if the occupants either were empty, or the occupants did not wish to reveal their identity.

The man driving was a regular New York hack-driver, who evidently had long since learned that absolute ignorance of the business and character of his fares meant success for him, in the shape of good fees and plenty of them.

The carriage was bowling along at a good round pace the way that Ikey Dave was going—namely, toward the open country above New York, and a moment's thought convinced Ikey that there was some one inside the carriage—perhaps two or three people.

"It doesn't much matter ter me whether it's them or not," thought Dave, "and yet I should like ter know. How kin I do thet 'ithout them er seein' me, that's ther question."

He was riding behind the carriage, although he could easily have distanced it. But he was thinking.

Suddenly a voice that he recognized as that of Mark Winton's came from the interior of the carriage, somewhat muffled, but still unmistakable.

"Is this the best you can do, driver? Can you not move your horses a little faster?"

"No, I can't. It's a long way to the place you want to go, and I propose to save my horses for a while."

The driver looked down behind his seat as he

spoke, indicating to Dave that he was speaking to Mark Winton through the front window.

"That's all ez I wanted ter know," muttered Dave. "If Mark Winton is in thar, so is Buck and thet other poor critter, Wible. All right, I'll block their game so sure ez my name is Dave Donahue."

He chuckled as he spoke, and then touching his black horse with his flexible cane and feeling his mouth gently, in an admonitory manner with the bridle, he dashed ahead into the darkness.

"Keep it up, boy! Keep it up, Sheridan, old feller. You shall hev a comfortable stable an' plenty ter eat an' drink at ther end uv this hyar trip."

There was lots of grit in the black horse, and in a comparatively short time he had carried Ikey Dave to the entrance of the passage in the clay bank that led into the stable in which we left the stallion, Shiloh, and Larry Lang the Thoroughbred.

"I must git in afore them thar other fellows git hyar, that's sure, ef I want ter do any good, muttered Ikey."

He threw himself from the saddle and opened the door in the bank with the certainty of one thoroughly familiar with the place.

He led his horse, Sheridan, into the passage, and had proceeded some distance before he heard something that made him stop, while an expression of apprehension that it was too dark to see, even had there been any one there to see it, swept across his face.

It was the loud snorting of an angry horse, while a terrible thumping and stamping that seemed to shake the very earth, although some distance away indicated that excitement of some kind existed in the stable.

For a few moments Ikey Dave listened intently, with his fingers nervously clutching the bridle-rein of Sheridan. Then he ejaculated:

"Thet thar stallion's gone crazy again, ez sure ez I'm hyar."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MYSTERIOUS WHISPER.

FOR the first few moments after Larry Lang was left alone with Shiloh in the underground stable he sat upon the edge of the cot, thinking over his situation.

At last he got up, examined the lantern, and satisfied himself that there was enough oil in it to last some hours, while a can of oil that stood upon the floor beneath gave promise of means of keeping it alight for days if necessary.

"So, That's all right!" he muttered. "There's light, a stove, nour, water, and other provisions here. So I shall not starve if I am left here for a while. And Shiloh is all right, too. Ain't you, old boy?"

He stepped up to the stallion as he spoke, and stroked his soft nose with the affection that some men have for horses, and that makes them treat the animals with more kindness than ordinary men can bestow, however much they may desire to do so.

The horse looked at Larry with his great, brown eyes, seeming to enjoy the caress, until the young man, with a parting pat of the satiny, black neck, turned away to examine more closely the apartment in which he was confined.

On every side the place was solid.

"Um! The only chance of getting out is through the roof, I guess, Shiloh," he said, addressing the horse in the absence of any human companion.

Above him were heavy rafters, supporting a sloping roof, but what was above it he could only conjecture.

"Whatever there is there, it's sure that I must find out, if I expect to get out of here," he muttered. "I do not propose to stay until those two rascals come back for me, and I don't mean to let them win money with Shiloh, if I can help it. He belongs to Kate Winton—Heaven bless her!—and if there is any profit in it she shall have it."

Thus speaking, he climbed with the agility of a cat to one of the cross-beams just above Shiloh's head, and was preparing to mount still higher in the hope of finding a weak spot in the roof that would give him egress to the open air, when something caused him to stop and look down in surprise and dismay.

It was a peculiar noise coming from the horse!

He was snorting as if he scented danger or battle, and his eyes had lost the placid look they wore while Larry was fondling him a few moments before. The whites showed ominously as the eyeballs rolled hither and thither. The foam on his mouth, too, evinced strong excitement, while the nervous quivering of his limbs and the impatient shaking of his long mane were fur-

ther proofs that there was trouble in the vicinity.

"Whoa, Shiloh! Whoa, old fellow!" said Larry, soothingly, from his perch just above the stallion's head.

Larry's voice, at ordinary times, was always sufficient to bring Shiloh to his senses, but it failed utterly now. It rather seemed to irritate him.

With a snort of rage and defiance, Shiloh sprung up into the air with all his four feet beneath him, and tossing his crest, seized the bottom of Larry Lang's coat in his strong, white teeth, and dragged him from the beam to the ground.

How the young fellow escaped being brained by the flying hoofs that were all over the room at once, he could never have told.

Agile and cool, Larry had no sooner reached the hard rock floor, with a tremendous crash, than he threw himself to one side, to escape, if possible, the hoofs of the horse.

As he moved, one of Shiloh's heels grazed his ear, and he thought, for a moment, that he had been struck by it.

He rolled over and over, and then, feeling himself by the side of the cot, made a desperate spring over it, dropping on the other side just as Shiloh kicked the cot into a hundred splinters with one blow of his iron-shod hoof.

The attack seemed to make the stallion wilder than ever.

He tore about the stable, kicking, plunging, foaming and snorting as if he were actually crazy.

He seemed to have no particular desire to injure Larry, but only to be possessed with an insane impulse to break, kill, destroy everything, animate and inanimate, within his reach.

"This is interesting," thought Larry, as he edged further away.

The stallion seemed to be all over the room at once. He was apparently possessed by the spirit of a demon.

He made a spring from one end of the stable to the other, and it was only by extraordinary agility that the young man saved himself.

What was Larry to do?

The horse seemed to become more infuriated every moment. He was feeding upon his own wrath.

"I'll have to whisper to him!" said Larry, aloud, as he reached one of the crossbeams, and drew up his feet so that the horse could not reach him.

With this mysterious remark, Larry prepared himself to conquer the wild horse.

The lantern, dimly burning, shed but a poor light over the large stable, but Larry's eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, and he could distinguish objects around him fairly well.

Shiloh was still tearing up and down, kicking, plunging and snorting, and there seemed to be no probability of his becoming calm within a reasonable time.

"I can't wait for him to cool off. I must cool him off," muttered Larry, philosophically. "He may kill me, but I must take my chances on that."

His plan of action was soon worked out.

First of all the stallion must be secured.

Larry looked about him and saw that a strong halter of new rope hung upon a post below him, but out of his reach.

"I must have that halter," thought Larry. "Here goes!"

He watched his opportunity. He must get it while the horse was at the other end of the stable.

Shiloh was at that moment immediately beneath him, kicking like a very devil. Then, something seemed to engage his attention at the other end of the stable, and away he went.

This was Larry's opportunity.

Like a cat he dropped to the floor, and grasped the halter. It had become entangled on the nail, and Larry could not disengage it immediately.

Then the stallion saw him, and like a thunderbolt dashed across the intervening space, just as Larry managed to tear the halter from the post.

Larry clutched the halter tightly, and looked up. It seemed as if the stallion were completely over him.

Larry rolled, or tumbled out of the way—he could never tell in what way—and the next moment was clinging to the beam above, with the horse snapping at him, but unable to reach him.

"All right, old fellow! I have you now," chuckled Larry, as he sat upon the beam, cross-legged, and examined the halter.

Shiloh had resumed his wild rushing up and down, having evidently forgotten all about Larry.

The young man drew the halter through his hand, and prepared for business.

Again came Shiloh, toward the end of the stable in which Larry sat upon his beam.

With a steady eye and hand, the young fellow prepared to cast the halter. He had braced himself firmly upon the beam, but at the same time in such a way that he could easily jump off if it was necessary.

At the instant that the stallion passed beneath him, he threw the halter at the animal's head.

It missed!

Shiloh only shook his head proudly, and Larry found himself with the long rope in his hand while the headpiece of the halter trailed upon the floor.

Another cast!

This time, as Shiloh rushed underneath him, Larry sent the halter spinning, and caught the stallion as neatly as if he had been adjusting the halter in the regular way.

It fell completely into its place.

At the instant that Larry threw the headpiece, he flung the long end around the beam half-a-dozen times with a dexterity worthy of an experienced *vaquero*.

With a roar of mingled rage and terror, Shiloh was flung back upon his haunches, while the beam, and, indeed, the whole roof of the stable, creaked and staggered with the strain.

"I hate to do it," muttered Larry. "He is too good a horse to be treated in that way. But I can not do anything else."

Shiloh struggled to his feet, his eyes glaring upward at Larry with an intensity that made the young man feel uncomfortable, it was so much like that of a human being in a state of frenzy.

But it was no time for sentiment.

Larry tightened the halter, and by carefully shortening the rope by extra turns around the beam, brought the stallion's head close to the beam.

The animal had stopped kicking, simply because it was inconvenient for him to keep on while his head was held so uncomfortably against the beam.

Now Larry showed his purpose in fastening the horse. He let himself down from the beam and cautiously stationed himself immediately in front of Shiloh's nose.

The response to this movement was a loud roar of rage, and the elevation of the iron-shod heels in a paroxysm of fury.

"Gently, Shiloh, gently, old boy!" murmured Larry, softly.

The stallion shook his head and kicked again, but still without disturbing the young man. The restraining halter prevented that.

Now Larry Lang tried the plan that he had felt sure, from the first, would be effective.

In Kerry he had been known as a "horse whisperer"—one of those people who hold a mysterious power over horses by which they are able to bend the animals to their will by *talking to them*.

Carefully Larry placed himself in such a position that he could whisper into Shiloh's ear, at the same time gently stroking the beautiful arched neck.

What he said could be heard only by the horse, even if there had been any human being present to try and overhear.

Larry crooned into the stallion's ear something like those wild, low melodies that are common in many parts of Ireland, every line of which ends with a falling inflection, giving it a singularly mournful effect. The melody was broken at intervals by a few words of Celtic—soft, soothing words, that rippled from the tongue of the speaker like the murmuring of a brook through a wooded hollow, carrying peaceful suggestions in every accent.

The influence of the whispering upon Shiloh seemed almost magical.

At first he tossed his head defiantly, as if he would resist the attempts of Larry to calm him. He had stopped his most violent demonstrations, but his bloodshot, glaring eyes, twitching ears and foaming mouth showed that the frenzy had not yet spent itself.

As Larry continued to whisper with more and more earnestness, the eyes gradually took on a quieter, calmer aspect, the ears ceased to twitch, and the horse was evidently bringing himself to a state in which he could be safely handled.

Larry Lang whispered softly, and stroked the neck patiently, while a satisfied smile stole over his face.

He saw that he was getting the stallion to be himself again.

He had not yet ventured to loosen the halter,

but now that the animal was nestling his nose against the young man's shoulder, and had changed his wild glance for one of recognition, he felt that he might give the stallion his head.

Cautiously he untwisted the rope, never ceasing his whispering into Shiloh's ear.

As soon as the stallion felt that he was free, he threw up his noble head and uttered a neigh that echoed through the apartment like a trumpet-blast!

"Gently, old fellow! Gently!" whispered Larry, patting the silky neck.

Shiloh bent his head until he had thrust his nose under the young man's arm, while his sensitive ears moved backward and forward as the soothing whispering continued.

The stallion was completely tamed!

"What was the matter, Shiloh, my hearty? What started you off that way?" whispered Larry, as he removed the halter and hung it upon its old nail.

He was not afraid of Shiloh suffering a relapse. He had seen him in his wild mood once before, and he knew that his fury always spent itself in one outburst.

Larry had looked carefully over the stallion and had removed with a sponge and water all traces of excitement that had shown themselves upon his glossy black coat, in the way of roughness and dust gathered during his bouncing up and down in the stable.

"There, Shiloh! Now you look like yourself again."

Shiloh neighed as if he understood the remark. Then he raised his crest and stood in a listening attitude. His quick ear had caught some sound not yet audible to the young man.

Larry could not yet hear anything, but he saw at once that the stallion had caught something. Larry listened intently.

"Ah! Footsteps!"

The next moment the door of the stable was burst open, and the feeble glimmer of the lamp showed Ikey Dave in the doorway.

"Ikey!"

"Larry!"

"Where from?"

"New York!"

"What's the game?"

"Ther game? Why! Thet we've euchered thet thar infernal scoundrel, Mark Winton, ez sure ez my name is Dave Donohue. If—"

"If—what?"

"If you are willin' ter take risks for the sake of Kate Winton?"

"Risks for Kate Winton?"

"That's what I said!"

"I'm ready to die for her!" cried Larry fervently, as he wrung Ikey Dave's hand.

"Larry Lang, you're er thoroughbred!" returned Ikey Dave, as he returned the pressure with a grip of iron.

CHAPTER XII.

WILKINS BOYD ON THE SCENT.

WHEN Kate Winton had entirely recovered her senses in the turret chamber of Winton Lodge she realized at once that she had been placed there as a prisoner either by or with the connivance of her cousin, Mark Winton.

As she sat up and looked around her, an amused smile crept over her face, which soon became a hearty laugh—the first she had enjoyed for many a day.

The situation struck her, not with fear, but as exceedingly ludicrous.

"The idea of their thinking they could keep me in this chamber longer than I want to stay. I, that know every twist and turn of this house."

She ascended the staircase that led to the telescope in the ceiling. She seated herself in the easy-chair, and adjusting the telescope, swept the surrounding country.

She saw the railroad and a train tearing along toward Yonkers from the direction of Albany. She watched it until it reached Yonkers, stopped and went on again, on its journey to New York.

The station was so arranged that she could not see the passengers get in or out of the train. Otherwise she would have seen Mark Winton and Wible step aboard the train, on their way to New York.

But, although she could not see them, her woman's instinct told her that they had gone to the city. She knew that would be their next move. Their plot had been revealed to her and she felt sure that to bring it to a successful conclusion they would go to New York. They could not do anything while remaining at Winton Lodge, where every movement would be known to half the inhabitants of Yonkers.

"Well, I must get out of this place as quickly

as possible," she said to herself. "Now that I know Mark Winton is a usurper, and he knows that I know it, he will not stop at anything."

As she spoke she ran down the special staircase into the room, and opened a small cupboard in one corner. In a matter-of-fact way she felt in a corner of the floor of the cupboard and seized an iron ring in the dark. She pulled. It yielded easily, and brought with it almost the whole floor of the cupboard. A flight of stairs was revealed. Kate went down them with a confidence that told she knew just where they would lead her. A dozen stairs and a door, with two bolts and a strong lock in which was the key confronted her. She unfastened this door and found herself on the very staircase up which she had been carried by Wible. She closed the door behind her, the lock catching with a snap, and then went calmly down the stairs.

Kate was a girl of quick thought. She had made up her mind what to do exactly.

So in less than two hours she was sitting in a comfortable room in the lower part of New York, pouring her troubles into the ear of Mr. Wilkins Boyd, the lawyer, who had read Mr. Winton's will and threatened to break the nose of Mark if he dared to address him on the street.

"Aha! Just what I expected," exclaimed the lawyer, when Kate had told her tale. "Just what I thought. Well, that is all right. We'll have that precious pair of rascals in the Tombs before they are much older. Mark that."

Wilkins Boyd trotted up and down his office with his thoughts working busily.

At last he stopped his trot and said to Kate in his brusque way:

"Come with me!"

Kate knew him, so she only smiled, as he put on his hat and marched out, locking the door of his office behind him. She followed him without a word.

He walked rapidly up Broadway till he reached City Hall Park. Then, as he looked at Kate, who was doing her best to keep up with him, he remarked, as if the idea had suddenly occurred to him:

"This won't do. You will be tired."

He hailed a Broadway car and placed her aboard as tenderly as if he was the most courtly of young cavaliers, instead of being what he so often proclaimed himself, "a tough old lawyer, without any foolishness or sentiment about him."

It was well on in the afternoon when the two entered the side door of Ikey Dave's place on the Bowery and went up to his sitting-room.

Mary was busy preparing supper for her father. As Kate entered Mary rushed up to her, and throwing her arms around the young lady's neck, gave her a sounding kiss that made the very tea-cups ring on the snug little table.

Mary liked Kate, and she was the sort of girl that cannot hide her feelings.

"Where's your father, Mary?" asked Mr. Boyd.

"Hyar he is!" burst in a hearty voice, as Ikey Dave entered the room and seized the lawyer by the hand.

The two men were old friends, so they "squared off" at each other and indulged in a playful sparring bout for a minute or two with the vim and jollity of schoolboys.

"Ah, Ikey, I'm not so young and active as I used to be," exclaimed the lawyer, as he sunk, puffing, into a chair.

"You handle your dukes pretty wal, though, Wilk, even yet," rejoined Ikey, admiringly. "You was allers a good 'un, an' I used ter be proud uv yer, ez my pupil."

"Well, well. Let's get to business, Ikey," interrupted the lawyer. "We haven't time to talk about past days now. Where's Mark Winton and that imp of the devil old Wible?"

"I hev'n't seen 'em sence last night."

"Well, you'll see them to-day. They are coming, I know. Come here. I want to talk to you quietly. You'll excuse us, ladies, I know."

Without waiting for an answer, Wilkins Boyd led the way into the gymnasium, which, as the reader knows, was the front room on the second floor, and was followed by Ikey Dave.

For half an hour they remained in the room, Kate assisting Mary Donahue in the preparation of the supper in the mean time, talking as lightly as if there were no trouble on her mind. Kate Winton believed in making herself as agreeable to those around her as she could, in spite of her troubles.

"Then they will be here to-night, will they?" exclaimed Wilkins Boyd, as he stepped into the room, evidently finishing a conversation that had been carried on in the front room.

"Yes," answered Ikey.

"All right. Well, never let them out of your sight."

"I'll do et, ez sure ez my name's Donahue," returned Ikey, heartily, as he grasped the lawyer's hand. "Anything fer thet thar gal?"

"Thank you, Mr. Donahue," said Kate, for she knew that she was the "gal" to whom Ikey Dave had referred.

"You keep her here with your daughter, Ikey, and try and find out what their game really is," went on the lawyer.

"I'll do it. Though I guess I know pretty well what they are lookin' fer now. They're trying ter git the horse so ez they kin git him inter ther races at Guttenberg and win er pot uv money on him. I know all thet."

"Oh, my horse—my Shiloh! Where is he?" asked Kate, eagerly.

"I'll tell yer where he is, Miss Kate. That is, I kin tell yer he is in ther hands uv that thief, Wible?"

"Wible?"

"Thet's who I said."

"But are you sure?" asked Kate, anxiously.

"Quite sure. But don't you worrit 'bout thet. I'll git ther hoss back fer yer, an' everything else ez belongs ter yer. You know what I told yer when you came down here before—that Ikey Dave 'ud stand by yer. Didn't I?"

Kate's only answer was to press the big sprawling hand of Ikey Dave with an earnestness that showed what her feelings were, as she accepted the invitation of Mary to sit down at the supper-table.

A quiet afternoon and evening were passed by Mary and Kate, but after supper the lawyer and Ikey Dave left them. Dave went down to his saloon, where, as we know, he afterward caught Wible and Mark Winton in conversation with Buck Williams.

Wilkins Boyd, with a satisfied smile on his face, made his way as fast as the train could carry him, to Yonkers, and presented himself at the front door of Winton Lodge about the time that Ikey Dave was racing on his black horse, after the carriage that was passing along by Central Park, with Wible and Mark Winton inside, and the discreet hackman driving.

"It is me, Mrs. Taylor," he said in response to the inquiring look of the housekeeper, who had answered his quiet rap, instead of allowing the flunkey to do so. In fact, she had sent all the servants to their quarters in the rear of the mansion to-day. She felt there was something unusual in progress, and she was not disposed to allow any family secrets to fall into the possession of servants who had no more interest in the Wintons than was attached to the regular drawing of their wages. Mrs. Taylor was a regular old-world retainer in all her thoughts and feelings, and she was particularly jealous of the family honor.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Taylor," he went on, as she admitted him into the hall with a courtesy such as was the fashion in the days of Martha Washington.

"Good-evening, Mr. Boyd. Do you know anything about—"

"Kate? Eh? Wasn't that what you were going to ask?" interrupted the lawyer, briskly. "Yes, well, don't you worry about her. She is all safe."

"Thank Heaven!"

"That's right, I say so, too. She's a good girl—a very good girl. And I'm thankful she is in a safe place. Moreover, she is going to get what belongs to her if Wilkins Boyd can manage it. You hear what I say."

"Yes, sir. I know you are her friend."

"That's what I am. Now, look here, Mrs. Taylor. You let me into that back room where the old man's desk is, and don't let me be disturbed."

"Very well, Mr. Boyd."

"I have found out that Kate Winton is the rightful heiress to all this property, and I am acting in her behalf."

"Yes, sir."

"You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't let anybody into the room, and, if possible, don't let any of the servants know that I am here."

"Yes, sir."

Mrs. Taylor had implicit confidence in Wilkins Boyd, and she had no hesitation in obeying him, however questionable it might seem to admit him into the private room of the supposed master of Winton Lodge.

Wilkins Boyd marched past Mrs. Taylor and entered the front parlor.

It was early in the evening, but the sun was quite low enough to warrant his closing the shutters. Even had it not been, Mr. Boyd was

not the man to be turned from any purpose he had formed by such a simple matter as the position of the sun.

He dismissed Mrs. Taylor with a short, but kindly "Good-night," and then locked the door. His next proceeding was to close the inside shutters of the back as well as front parlor. Then he turned on the incandescent lights till both rooms were actually ablaze, and taking an old and deeply-colored meerschaum pipe from his pocket, produced some strong cut cavendish from a piece of paper, and seating himself in the comfortable chair before Mark Winton's desk, began to smoke.

He appeared to be merely idling, as he sat back in the easy-chair, rocking himself to and fro, and allowing clouds of the strong tobacco smoke to encircle him.

But he was not idling. He was thinking.

Suddenly he sprang up and examined the desk before him, carefully.

"He was a secret old fellow, was William Winton, deceased," muttered Mr. Boyd, as he took a bunch of keys from his pocket, and tried one key after another in the lock of the desk. The sixth key fitted, and the desk was open.

"Um! The secret receptacle that he said was in this desk. I have heard him boast about it many a time. I wonder where it is."

Wilkins Boyd was muttering to himself as he poked about the desk, but nothing in the way of a secret drawer or hiding-place of any kind could he discover.

"It's no use. I shall have to give it up," he exclaimed at last, "I cannot find it. And yet I know he made a will that he signed the very day before he died. I ought to know, for I drew it up. Still, he was forever making wills and destroying them. That was his chief amusement during the last few years of his life. So how am I to know that that will signed in my presence as about the last business act of his life, is still in existence? Bah! It makes me mad!"

To prove that Wilkins Boyd really was mad, he took hold of one of the brass knobs of the window shutter near which he happened to be standing, and gave it a twist toward the left.

He did it simply to relieve himself of some of his spleen, thinking he would twist the knob off.

To his surprise the knob turned very easily.

"A very badly built house this," he growled. "The old man knew as little about the details of house-building as he did of leaving his property properly disposed. That is evident."

He thoughtfully twisted the knob more and more, and then, to his unutterable astonishment, one of the panels of the shutter fell out and dropped upon the floor.

"Hello! What's this?"

There was some excuse for his exclamation, for not only had the panel fallen out, but a flat parcel that was evidently a dirty red cotton pocket-handkerchief, folded into a small space, dropped at his feet.

He picked up the handkerchief as if it had been something very precious, and then, hastily fumbling at it with a stifled cry of surprise, stuffed it into an inner pocket and buttoned his coat closely over it.

"I always suspected the old man," he muttered, as he replaced the panel and walked slowly and thoughtfully out of the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

LARRY HAS A TUSSELE IN THE DARK.

IKEY DAVE and Larry Lang left the stable at Spuyten Duyvil together, Ikey leading his black horse by the bridle, and Larry Lang walking by his side, wrapped in thought.

"Where are we going?" asked Larry, after a pause, during which they had been threading their way among the tall trees in the inclosure near the entrance to the passage leading to the underground stable.

"Why, I should think we had better get back ter New York," replied Dave, unhesitatingly.

"No. I don't think so. I'm in favor of going to Winton Lodge. I want to know what that thief of the worruld Mark has been telling the people up there about Shiloh, be jabers," said Larry dropping into the brogue that he generally affected when he felt in good spirits.

"But Miss Kate is in New York."

"In New York?"

There was horror as well as surprise in Larry Lang's tones as he stopped in his walk to try and look into the imperturbable face of his companion.

"That's what I said."

"But where?"

"Whar d'yer think," returned Ikey Dave, tantalizingly. "Whar d'yer think."

Larry Lang sprang at Ikey Dave and seized him by the collar.

"Ikey Dave, you tell me where that girl is, or, by the powers of Hades I'll choke you to death!"

Ikey Dave chuckled as he grasped the wrists of the young man.

"Larry Lang, she is all right. She is safe at my house on the Bowery, and at this time she is most likely fast asleep with my daughter Mary."

Larry dropped his hands, and patting his companion gently on the back, said, in a trembling voice, altogether unlike that in which he generally spoke:

"Ikey, I beg your pardon! I know you are a good fellow, and I ought not to act in such a wild manner. But—but—Kate Winton is my foster-sister, and if any harm were to come to her, I—I—"

His words died off in a mere stammer, as Ikey took the bridle of the black horse and led him on through the thicket.

"Larry," exclaimed Ikey.

"Well?"

"You're er dandy!"

"Eh?"

"I say you're er dandy, and I like yer. You did quite right ter git riled up when you thought ez ther pretty young gal might be in danger."

"But, Ikey—"

"Never mind. Yer didn't offend me by flyin' at my throat. I'd ha' been disappointed ef yer hed done anythin' else. You kin bet yer boots I knows ther kind uv feller yer air, an' I'm proud uv yer."

Ikey seized Larry Lang's hand and gave it a wring that proved the heartiness of his words.

"You're a thoroughbred, Larry."

"Thank you, Ikey," responded Larry, simply.

"You're welcome."

The two friends had nearly reached the end of the thicket, and were making a detour so that they could come out upon the high road some distance below the spot where the path led to the stable.

Suddenly the black horse stopped, and throwing up his head, moved uneasily from side to side.

"Whoa!" cried Ikey.

"Look out!" shouted Larry.

Even as he spoke, a knife gleamed in the darkness behind Ikey Dave, and would have been buried in his back between the shoulders had not Larry Lang interfered.

Like a cannon-ball, Larry jumped at the wielder of the knife, and the next instant he was rolling on the ground among the grass and underbrush in a life-and-death struggle with Buck Williams.

It was very dark. The moon was peeping above the horizon, but it was in its first quarter, and the light it gave was not more than enough to make the darkness visible.

"Yer varmint! I hev ye now!" hissed a hoarse voice into Larry's ear, as he felt two arms around him just below his arms, while something that felt like a big stone, but was really Buck Williams's chin, pressed into his chest with such force that it seemed as if it would stop his breathing entirely.

Larry heard a confused stamping and galloping of horses' hoofs, and then the sounds died away, so that all he could hear was the heavy breathing of his assailant as he put forth all his strength to hold the young man on the ground, with this fearful pressure upon his chest.

Larry did not speak. He had been in tight places before, and he knew that it was not wise to waste his breath in talking. Sometimes every breath might be of life and death value.

Buck had him at a disadvantage. He had managed to get a good hold upon Larry at the first onslaught, and he was maintaining it as if he meant never to let go while there was a chance of killing his opponent.

But Larry had different views.

He knew that the hold of Buck Williams would not be easy to break, but he felt that the situation made it worth while to try what he could do.

Larry was lying partly on his back and partly on his side. Behind him was a fallen log, so that Buck could not push him over upon his back.

The young man appreciated the importance of this fact and it gave him hope.

Another thing in his favor was that he had both feet planted against the trunk of a tree, while Buck had no such brace for his feet.

"Now for it," thought Larry, as he nerved himself for a desperate effort.

There would not have been any sense in trying to push against the hard, murderous chin that was so firmly set in his chest. But he had another plan to get the better of Buck.

Of course all this took place in a few seconds

—in much less time than it takes to write or even read it.

Larry made sure that his feet were firmly implanted against the tree-trunk, and that there was no fear of Buck being able to turn him over on his back.

Larry's arms were around Buck. But now he unclasped his hands and bringing them between his assailant and himself, dug his fists, with all his force into Buck's stomach.

"Ow!" howled Buck.

Involuntarily he loosened his chin slightly.

This was what Larry wanted. He was as active and lithe as an acrobat. Pushing his feet against the tree-trunk with a sudden and powerful movement, he wrenched himself sideways. The chin was dislodged from its position in his chest, and Buck seemed to fall over almost limp.

The dig in his stomach had demoralized him completely.

Larry had torn himself away by a sort of somersault, and had partly reached an upright attitude when Buck recovered himself, and again grasped him around the waist.

This time he did not get the young man in quite such a favorable position, however. His chin was resting upon Larry's shoulder, and the two men bore a grotesque resemblance to a couple waltzing at a "tough" ball.

"Now, yer young imp, I'll choke ther life out uv yer, an' cut yer up arterwards," growled Buck Williams, in an ecstasy of rage.

As he spoke he released Larry with his right hand, and, stooping, picked up the knife with which he had first threatened Ikey Dave, from the ground at his feet. It had been knocked from his hand at the onslaught of Larry Lang, but had dropped just below him, and he had known of its presence there all through his struggle with the young man.

But he reckoned without his host when he thought he could take this advantage of Larry.

The Thoroughbred had not acquired his pseudonym for nothing.

He divined Buck Williams's purpose on the instant, and took measures to checkmate it without loss of time.

Buck had no opportunity of carrying out his amiable intention of burying his knife in Larry Lang's chest.

The implement was a bowie of most murderous pattern and the way Buck Williams flourished it indicated that he was perfectly familiar with its use.

The knife was swinging in the air, but Larry was on the alert, and ere it could descend he had seized the wrist of the desperado with his left hand and held it so firmly that he could not move it an inch.

Now came the struggle. The burly ruffian was indignant that a stripling like Larry could hold him at bay. Although he knew that the young fellow was strong and active, he had no idea that his strength was enough to hold him successfully against a big, powerful man, whose boast it had been in the Far West that he had never backed down for any two of the rough fellows he had quarreled with out there.

"This hyar boy's a perfect wonder," he muttered, as he wrenched and writhed in the attempt to get his knife hand down.

Buck knew most of the tricks that are usually brought into use in bowie-knife fighting, and he employed them, one after another, in his present struggle.

But, twist and turn as he would, he could not gain a second's advantage over this young fellow in his gray woolen shirt that fitted his powerful, well-knit figure so neatly, revealing rather than hiding the fact that he had no superfluous flesh on his frame to hide the muscles that responded so readily to his will in this deadly fight.

For perhaps a minute the two had been putting forth all their strength against each other.

Then, as if by mutual consent, they relaxed a little but both on the alert to take advantage of any incautiousness on the part of the other.

"Will yer git out uv this ef I let yer go?" growled Buck, as he tried to see the expression of Larry Lang's face in the darkness.

Larry laughed contemptuously.

"Do you think I am likely to git until I feel like it?" he asked.

"Wal, you'd better feel like it, ef yer hev any sense."

Larry did not answer in words, but he jerked the right hand of his antagonist so severely and suddenly that the knife flew away. Quick as thought he followed up this movement by putting on what is known in wrestling as a "grapevine twist." It is a "lock" that, when done thoroughly by a clever wrestler, puts the other man very

much at a disadvantage, and often decides a contest.

Larry Lang knew most of the tricks of wrestling, and this was one of his favorite "locks."

Buck Williams, although not at all a man to be despised in a wrestle, was not so skillful as his young opponent. He depended more upon his strength than his knowledge of the science of wrestling.

At this stage of the contest, skill counted for more than strength.

Larry's legs were twisted around those of Buck in a sinuous snake-like fashion that left the great fellow literally in the toils of his antagonist.

There was a sudden strain on the part of Larry, a grunt from Buck, as he tried to repel the attack, and then he was lying on his back, while Larry knelt upon him and held him down as firmly as if the great tree-trunk lying by his side were upon him.

This was no time for sentiment. Larry knew that if he wanted to save his own life he must put it out of the power of Buck Williams to take it.

He did not want to kill the desperado. It would be too much like murder, even if a coroner's jury were to decide it justifiable homicide—by no means a certainty however, considering there were no witnesses to the quarrel to say that Larry was acting only in self-defense.

"I'll just choke him a little," thought the young man as he tightened the clutch he already had upon Buck's throat.

There was the possibility of the choking being done too much, even with all Larry's humane intention, but he was not allowed to take the risk.

He was just getting a comfortably tight hold upon Buck Williams's throat when two men came forward out of the surrounding gloom, and in a matter-of-fact, business-like manner, seized Larry and threw him to the ground, as at the same time, Buck Williams recovered himself, and assisted in overcoming the young man.

Five minutes later Larry Lang found himself a prisoner in the stable, alone, his captors, whoever they were, having blindfolded him with a handkerchief, and never allowed him to see who it was that had so neatly overcome him just when he was making it pleasant for Buck Williams.

CHAPTER XIV.

STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER.

It is perhaps needless to say that the mysterious assailants of the Thoroughbred were Mark Winton and Wible. The reader will easily have guessed it.

They had missed Buck Williams who had strolled away into the darkness and had accidentally come upon Ikey Dave and Larry, with the results given above.

They had gone to the stable and were just about to enter it when they had heard the galloping of a horse. This was when Ikey Dave, whose hand was twisted in the bridle of his beautiful black horse, had been dragged away by the animal as he took fright at the attack of Buck Williams, and broke away in a restless gallop. This was the reason Larry Lang had been left to fight Buck alone, without any assistance from Dave.

"Now, we have the horse, we had better take care of it," was the remark of Mark Winton, the next day, as he, Wible and Buck Williams stood in a stable in a side street near Fourth avenue, the next day, and admired the beautiful animal they had taken from the stable at Spuyten Duyvil when they left Larry there, a prisoner.

"Trouble enough ter git!" grumbled Buck, stroking his red beard reflectively. "I might ha' been wiped out by thet thar young feller ef you hadn't come up just when yer did."

"Ah, but you see, my blooming Buck, we did come up," put in Wible, with a sniff of self-satisfaction.

"You!" was all Buck said, but there was a world of contempt in the tone in which it was uttered.

"Never mind about that," interrupted Mark Winton, impatiently. "Get Shiloh out to Guttenberg as soon as you can, and remember that his name is Alabama, after this. That is a good name, isn't it?"

"Good enough. But I'd rather call him Shiloh," returned Buck. "It's bad luck to change ther name uv er hoss. Every one knows that."

"That may be. But it wouldn't be safe to run this horse in its own name under the circumstances," answered Mark Winton, with a cold smile.

"Not much. It 'u'd be a bloomin' mistake when you know you've stole the 'orse," remarked

Wible pulling his tight coat around him—a habit he had when he wanted to say something particularly disagreeable.

Mark frowned, but Wible was coolly looking over the black stallion, and stroking his arched neck as if he had not noticed the other's displeasure.

"Moreover," Mark went on, "we want to spring this horse, Shiloh, on the rascals at Guttenberg as something new—an unknown. If they knew it was Shiloh the odds would be altogether too short to enable me to make anything by my scheme this summer."

"Oho! I see! You're er cute one, you air," grunted Buck, admiringly. "You wasn't born lately. You're more'n five years old."

A gruff "Haw-haw-haw!" followed this remark. This was Buck Williams's way of laughing, and he only indulged in it when he thought he had said something particularly good, as on the present occasion.

"Well, you had better be getting away. Have you arranged with Dave Donahue to stay away for a while?"

Buck Williams turned up his nose scornfully.

"Dave Donahue—Ikey Dave! Who is he? What hez he ter do with me?"

"Nothing particular, I suppose. I thought he was your master, that's all."

"My master?" howled Buck. "My master! What d'ye mean?"

He dashed his broad Panama hat on the floor and tugged at his red beard viciously, while the ugly scar upon his face to which reference has been made more than once, became livid in his fury.

"Well, your employer, then. What is the use of making so much fuss about a mere word?"

"Yes, why do you kick up sich a bloomin' row about it?" put in Wible.

Wible had to jump aside quickly, or he would have been knocked down. But he knew Buck Williams and he prudently kept out of reach while making his remarks.

"I'll hev you ter know thet I work fer Dave Donahue jist when I please an' ez much ez I please," grumbled Buck. "When I take it inter my head ter stay away from his old ranch fer a day, or er week or er month, or three months, I jist do it. See? Master? He ain't no master uv mine. No man is my master."

As he uttered the last sentence, defiantly, the door of the stable, that rested half-open, flew inward under a heavy push and Ikey Dave stood in the opening.

"Yer durned skunk! I ain't yer master, ain't I?" he shouted, as he stepped in front of Buck Williams and shook his brawny fist before the desperado's nose. "D'ye remember what I did ter yer in Californy, when yer tried ter bluff me that yer wasn't cheating at poker in Snaky Simmons's saloon? D'yer remember it?"

Buck Williams's face was a study. He would like to have torn the very life out of Ikey Dave at one clutch, had he dared. As it was, he only stood and stared at the man who was thus bearding him before the group in which he had, a moment before, posed as a bullying swaggerer.

"Now, look hyar, Buck Williams; I know yer, an' I know what you've been doin' with these two fellers."

Mark Winton started in indignation.

"Oh, yer needn't jump, Mark Winton. I ain't 'fraid uv yer. You ain't got no young gal ter deal with now," went on Ikey Dave.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean thet you've stole a hoss thet is worth a million dollars, if properly handled."

"Stole it?" repeated Mark, making a movement as if he would attack Ikey Dave.

But Dave did not condescend to notice Mark any further. Turning toward Buck Williams, he said in a suppressed voice, that told of indignation hardly to be kept down:

"Buck Williams, put up your hands!"

At the same time he threw himself into a posture of self-defense, left arm extended, his right partly shielding his breast, his left foot forward, with his body lightly balanced on the ball of the right.

Buck Williams's right hand flew to his waistband involuntarily. But the bowie-knife was not there. He had lost it in his struggle with Larry Lang in the wood the night before, and had been unable to find it in the darkness.

Ikey Dave smiled. He knew what the movement indicated, and he understood the disappointment expressed in Buck Williams's face.

"Put up yer hands, you cur! This ain't no place for knives. I'm goin' ter lick yer 'cordin' ter ther rules uv ther London Prize Ring, right hyar, yer onderstand? Don't you?"

Dave sparred in a light and easy fashion, and made a feint at his opponent's nose.

"Hold on, Dave. Let me take my coat off. 'Tain't no use havin' er mill with all yer thick clothes on, is it?"

Ikey Dave did not answer, but, throwing off his sack coat, again put up his hands.

Buck Williams did the same and faced Dave.

As the two men stood there in the open space in the roomy stable, with Mark Winton and Wible looking on curiously, and the magnificent black stallion in his stall in the corner, eating oats contentedly, as if there were no angry men within a hundred miles of him, it must be admitted that they presented a splendid picture of physical manhood.

They were actual gladiators.

"Time!" cried Ikey Dave, as he slowly circled around Buck, watching for a chance to deliver a blow.

Both men were wary.

Although Ikey Dave had often proved in friendly bouts that he was more than a match for Buck Williams, the latter was an antagonist not to be despised. He understood all the tricks of the prize-ring, and although he had never taken part in a professional contest, it is more than probable that he would have made a good showing had he ever done so. Ikey Dave knew all this, and besides that, it was his habit always to be cautious; he wanted the satisfaction of thrashing Buck Williams to-day, and he was determined not to be balked of it by any carelessness of his own.

The men sparred for a full minute.

Suddenly, Ikey Dave saw his chance. Buck had dropped his guard for a second, and before he knew what had happened his opponent's fist smashed against his chin and sent him sprawling upon his back at the other end of the stable.

"Well done," burst in Wible, involuntarily, for the little man enjoyed a sparring exhibition, although he lacked courage to take part in such exercises himself.

Buck Williams sprung to his feet, and with an angry flash at Wible, as if to warn him that he might expect something at the first opportunity, he flew at Ikey Dave again.

His onslaught was so terrific that he broke down Dave's guard and planted a blow on his cheek that resounded with a smack through the stable and made the black horse start.

But Buck did not get away without a return. His blow on the cheek was repaid by one in the right eye and another in the mouth that made Buck's hp swell under his red beard, and did not add to his personal beauty. The round wound up by the two men clinching and falling in a heap on the floor.

Ikey Dave tore himself away from the grasp of his antagonist, and retiring to the end of the stable, seated himself upon the bottom of an upturned pail and wiped his hot face with his handkerchief in the most matter-of-fact sort of way.

Buck, at the other end of the stable, found a large sponge, used for cleaning horses, which he used to wipe his face and make himself generally fit for the next round.

"Time!" cried Ikey Dave, and again the two men marched to the center and resumed sparring.

"This 'ere is splendid," croaked Wible, delightedly. "If I 'ad known we was goin' to 'ave a regular prize-fight to-day, I should 'ave felt good for a week before."

The men were evidently beginning to feel the effects of their hard work—especially Buck. He was blowing and panting, and his blows were evidently not as powerful as at first. Still he hammered away, and Ikey Dave being also somewhat wearied, took almost as many cracks as he gave.

At last, it seemed to dawn upon Ikey Dave that he must do something decisive if he was going to get satisfaction out of his battle. In the language of the prize-ring, he made up his mind to "sail in and finish his man."

Bracing himself up with an effort, Ikey managed to deal the desperado one, two, three hard blows in quick succession. The last one was a knock-down, and it was evident that Buck had had all the pugilistic exercise he wanted for one day.

"Hooray!" yelled Wible, in the excitement of the moment.

"Shut up, you fool!" hissed Mark Winton in his ear, angrily.

"Why?"

"Why? Can't you see anything at all?" retorted his companion with a scowl.

"I dunno what you mean. I knows as I likes to see a bloomin' good mill, an' this 'ere's the best I've seen since I left the old country."

"But can't you see that if this big brute Buck

Williams is beaten, he may refuse to help us out with our scheme? It is quite likely he will blame us for it in some way."

"Why? What have you got to do with it?" Mark Winton was about to answer, when Buck, who had been sitting on the brick floor in a corner, wiping his face with the sponge, suddenly sprang to his feet, and seizing a hatchet that he had noticed on the shelf from which he had taken the sponge, threw it with all his force at Ikey Dave.

It missed his head by about a quarter of an inch.

Dave's back was toward his late antagonist, and he was in the act of putting on his coat when the hatchet flew past his head and sunk deeply into a wooden post near him.

Ere he could, turn Buck Williams was upon him with a large pair of shears used for trimming the manes and tails of horses.

The shears were a frightful weapon in the hand of a desperate and powerful man.

Buck raised them and was about to bring them down in the neck or back of Ikey, while Mark Winton and Wible stood by, actually frozen with horror, when the door burst open, an active form bounded into the stable, and Larry Lang was upon Buck Williams!

To wrench the shears from him and throw him to the floor was the work of a second, and then the Thoroughbred looked at Wible.

"Where the deuce do you come from?" cried the little man, in deadly astonishment.

Larry might have answered, but for another distraction.

This was nothing less than the appearance of Kate and Wilkins Boyd, Esq., the lawyer!

"What are you doing here?" demanded Mark. "How in thunderation did she get out of the turret chamber in Yonkers?" added Wible.

"Who let you out of the stable at Spuyten Duyvil?" growled Buck, as he looked at Larry.

"Any more questions?" asked Wilkins Boyd, looking around him pleasantly.

"Yes, one," sneered Mark Winton, in his grating tones. "What is the object of this young lady in coming to a place like this? Does she think she has any property here? Perhaps she would like that horse, Shiloh, standing in the stall over there? But before she gets it, she will have to prove that it is hers. I say it is mine."

"And I say you are a liar," returned Wilkins Boyd, his face flushing up like a very large beet-root, as he patted Kate Winton's gloved hand gently between his own two great, fat palms.

CHAPTER XV.

VILLAINY CHECKMATED.

WHEN Wilkins Boyd cried "Liar!" everybody waited to see what would come next.

Mark stood looking at the lawyer, with his fingers twitching, as if he longed to avenge the insult upon the crimson face of Mr. Wilkins Boyd.

The lawyer was not in the least upset by this, however. He simply stood looking at the young man as if he thought him a rather peculiar sort of animal, who should have been in a menagerie or museum.

"Mark Winton, I have one thing more to say to you, and I may as well say it here, although a stable is not usually the place in which important legal complications are settled. However, all places are alike in the eyes of the law, and I will proceed."

"What jargon is this?" demanded Mark Winton, contemptuously.

"You'll find out that it is serious jargon before I am through with you, young man," returned Wilkins Boyd, significantly.

"Well, go on."

"Don't you be in a hurry. I'll get to it soon enough—too soon for you, or I'm very much mistaken."

"That's right, Mr. Boyd, let ther skunk hev it," put in Ikey Dave, who had been listening intently to all that had been said.

"I will let him have it," said Wilkins Boyd.

"Well, what is it?" exclaimed Mark Winton, impatiently.

"Just this. Old William Winton made another will after that in which he gave you possession of the property known as Winton Lodge, and all the other houses, lands, etc., of which he died the owner."

Mark turned pale.

"It's a lie!" he said, coldly.

"It's the truth!" retorted Wilkins Boyd. "It is the truth, for I know where the will is!"

Wible turned a sickly white—all but his nose, whose color no emotions could change.

"You know where the will is, do you?" hissed Mark. "Where is it?"

Either by accident or design, Wilkins Boyd pointed one of his chubby forefingers full at Wible.

The result of this was rather astonishing.

Wible dropped upon his knees—the tight coat cracking at the seams under the strain—and looked up beseechingly into the face of the lawyer.

Mark Winton seized the trembling little man by the shoulder, but Larry Lang interfered and gently but firmly, dragged Mark away.

"Fair play is a jewel, we used to say in County Kerry, Mither Winton," remarked Larry, with just a touch of the brogue that sometimes would play upon the tongue.

Mark bit his lip, but made no reply.

"What are you doing there, you poor creature?" asked Wilkins Boyd, looking scornfully at Wible.

For answer, Wible dived into the inner pocket of his tight coat and brought forth a pocket-book, following it up by producing from the pocketbook, the will that Mark Winton had had hidden in the secret compartment in his desk, and which Wible had snatched from him at the time he imprisoned Kate Winton in the turret chamber at Winton Lodge.

"Here it is, Mr. Boyd. Here's the bloomin' paper. Now, spare me!"

Wilkins Boyd took the paper, opened it, and read:

"Last will and testament of William Winton. 'Um! Yes. Well, I see this will bears a later date than that which gave Mark Winton the property.'"

Mark Winton uttered a howl of rage like an infuriated wild beast. Then, ere any one could stop him, he darted past Larry Lang, and, snatching the will from the hand of Wilkins Boyd, tore it into a dozen pieces!

Larry Lang grasped the man by the throat, and snatched the fragments of the will from him, flinging him back as he did so.

"The rascal!" cried Larry. "But, fortunately, the pieces are all here, and they are just as good, bedad, as if the will was whole. I know that much about law, anyhow."

"You are right to a certain extent, Larry—to a certain extent. But, to tell the truth, that will is not worth the paper it is written on."

A flush of hope illumined Mark Winton's leaden face.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because there is another and still later will!"

"And that bequeaths—" began Mark Winton, eagerly.

"Everything to Kate Winton, like the other, with a few changes in the disposal of legacies for old servants, and so forth."

"Is that true?" asked Mark.

"True as Gospel," returned Wilkins Boyd. "I have that will."

Mark darted forward.

"Oh, it isn't in my pocket, young man. I'm too cautious for that. So you needn't assault me."

"Well, at all events, the black horse, Shiloh, shall never belong to her!" howled Mark, in ungovernable rage, as he drew a heavy revolver from his pocket.

"What do you want ter do?" asked Ikey Dave, as he seized Mark by the arms, and held him as if in a vise. "What is yer game with thet thar gun?"

"I'm goin' to blow the brains out of Shiloh!"

"Now, hold on, young man! Thet's er very good hoss ez yer hev, right hyer. I ought ter know. But, he ain't Shiloh."

"Not Shiloh?" exclaimed Mark, dropping his hand, with the pistol, to his side.

"No."

"What is it, then?"

"Thet's Sheridan. Ther hoss ez I left in ther stable at Spuyten Duyvil when I took Larry Lang out uv thar in er friendly way."

"And where is Shiloh?"

"Shiloh is comfortable, in his own stable at Winton Lodge, whar he wuz put several hours ago. You hev'n't any business with him. He belongs to Miss Kate, along with all ther other property ther old man left."

"Beaten on every side!" muttered Mark. "I guess I may as well finish it."

He raised the revolver in his hand to his temple and fired.

The ball whistled harmlessly past his head.

"That won't do," said Larry Lang, who had struck his elbow just in time to divert the muzzle of the pistol from his temple. "I have a warrant for you!"

"A warrant!" cried every one at once.

"Yes. You see, I have always had a taste for ferreting out crime, and I have been sworn in as a detective in the employ of the Secret Service of New York."

"That's true. I know all about that," put in Wilkins Boyd.

"So," continued Larry, "I arrest Mark Winton for fraud and for the attempted stealing of the thoroughbred Kentucky horse Shiloh," and with a dexterous movement, Larry slipped a pair of handcuffs upon Mark Winton's wrists, and then felt in his pocket for something else.

What that something else was was soon apparent when he drew forth another pair of handcuffs and clapped them upon Wible, with the remark:

"And you, Andrew Wible, are charged with being implicated in the aforesaid fraud and robbery."

"Oh, Lord!" gasped Wible, "am I gobbled, too?"

"Buck Williams, I have one for—" began Larry. Then he stopped, and, with a peculiar smile, said composedly: "He's gone! Well, it does not make much difference. I'll catch him. A fellow like that cannot keep in hiding. I'll have him in less than a week."

Larry Lang the Thoroughbred, was right. He did catch Buck Williams in less than a week, and he, with Mark Winton and Wible, had to stand trial on the charges of trying to defraud Kate Winton out of her property, and of stealing the stallion Shiloh. All three managed to escape however. There was a flaw in the indictment some said while others declared that the miscarriage of justice was due only to the stupidity of the jury.

Kate Winton is now safe in the possession of the large estate left her by her old uncle. She is the same sweet, modest girl she was when she acted as housekeeper and nurse for Mr. William Winton. She conducts the affairs of her household as easily as if she were an old housekeeper. Mrs. Taylor is her chaperone and assistant and Kate often says the old lady is a mother to her.

It is a bright September day, Kate Winton, in a blue riding-habit that fits snugly to her rounded figure, is standing by the open stable door at the back of Winton Lodge. She is talking to some one within the stable.

"Is he not beautiful?" she is saying. "My own Shiloh! He will never desert his mistress, will he? He is a thoroughbred!"

A velvety nose comes through the doorway and nestles on her shoulder.

"Shiloh, my beauty!" she continues, as she strokes the velvety nose and the black glossy neck.

"Yes, he is a beauty, indeed, Kate. I admire him more than ever each time I see him," chimed in a manly voice, and Larry Lang strolled from the stable and patted the neck of the proud black stallion.

"Yes, and I can never forget how you risked your very life to keep Shiloh for me," said the young girl, taking Larry's hand in hers. "It was the act of a man who would do anything for the sake of a feeble woman. You have earned your title over and over again. Indeed you have," she continued gratefully. "I am proud of my foster-brother, and I am sure that before long the name of the greatest detective in the country will be Larry Lang, the Thoroughbred!"

THE END.

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